

A SOCIAL INCLUSION PROGRAM BASED ON LOCAL DYNAMICS: THE CASE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAM OF TURKEY

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Abstract

Poverty programs in advanced industrial countries have transformed into social exclusion programs, and the concept of social exclusion began to be extensively debated. Parallel to the social policy framework of West, Turkey has also begun to strengthen social policies. In 2008, Turkey's Ministry of Development launched a new social grant program known as the Social Support System (SODES). This article analyses the societal conditions that cause establishment of the program, the preparation process and project cycle of the initiative, and basic outcomes of the program. The study concludes with policy recommendations for current and possible social fund programs.

Keywords: Social Policy, Social Exclusion, Social Development, Social Fund, Turkey.

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YEREL DİNAMİKLERE DAYALI BİR SOSYAL İÇERME PROGRAMI: TÜRKİYE’NİN SOSYAL DESTEK PROGRAMI ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Gelişmiş ülkelerde zaman içerisinde yoksulluk programları sosyal dışlanma programlarına evrilmiş ve geniş şekilde tartışılmıştır. Batının sosyal politika çerçevesine paralel olarak, Türkiye sosyal politikalarını güçlendirmeye başlamıştır. 2008 yılında Kalkınma Bakanlığı Sosyal Destek Programı (SODES) adıyla yeni bir sosyal hibe programı başlatmıştır. Bu makale; bu programın kurulmasına yol açan sosyal şartları, programın hazırlık sürecini, proje döngüsünü ve programın temel çıktılarını analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, mevcut ve potansiyel sosyal hibe programları için tavsiyelerle sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Politika, Sosyal Dışlanma, Sosyal Kalkınma, Sosyal Fon, Türkiye.

Introduction

The concepts of social exclusion and inclusion have been widely discussed in academia and government policymaking circles throughout the second half of twentieth century. As discussion around the topics of social policy gained ground among western governments and international organizations, it has become increasingly popular among developing world leaders as well.

In line with the international policy environment, Turkey has increased funds geared towards social policy areas, strengthening institutional structures and developing new policy models. Beginning in 2000, Turkey entered an era of economic and political stability. After the severe economic crises of 2001, indicators showed a significant recovery. Due to deep levels have been seen during the crises, the year 2001 has been taken as base year for the recovery, and growth performance after that has been recorded as exponential. Within this context of economic recovery, political stability and commitment to implement austerity measures and policies ensured progress. However, despite these positive developments, inequality, extensive regional disparities and a highly centralized administrative structure for public policy remained in place.

Given these persistent social ails, in 2008 the Ministry of Development (MoD) launched the Social Support Program (Sosyal Destek Programı, SODES) with the aim of increasing social integration and strengthening social capital in the least developed regions of Turkey. SODES depends on social projects prepared by local actors, selected and monitored by provincial SODES Project Offices and supervised by the MoD.

This article evaluates basic developments in social policy areas that necessitated a social inclusion program and the process that led to the initiation of SODES. It

also assesses the program's contribution to the literature on social exclusion and social funds management. The study concludes with an evaluation of the lessons learned from the program's implementation in order to provide feedback to government officials and ministries in their routine services and implementations.

Background

Although a number of definitions for social exclusion exist, one of the most prevailing categorizations was formulated by the London School of Economics' Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion and holds that, "An individual is socially excluded if he/she does not participate in key activities of the society in which he/she lives, including consumption, production, political engagement and social integration".

A broader concept of social exclusion was offered by Room (1995, p. 7) as, "a concept rooted in continental social theory and maintains a focus 'primarily on relational issues, in other words, inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power' ... the extent to which some groups in the population are denied access to the principal social and occupational milieu and to the welfare institutions that embody modern notions of social citizenship". Penna and Brien (2008, p. 84) add that social exclusion is "marginalisation" that is not "confined strictly to income levels, [but rather] stretches across all areas of social life".

Although Jean Klanfer applied the terminology of social exclusion first time in 1965, the concept began to receive wide acceptance in the following years after René Lenoir, French Secretary of State for Social Welfare, addressed social exclusion in his book *Les exclus: Un français sur dix* (The excluded: One Frenchman out of Ten). Lenoir claimed that one out of every 10 people in France was an "exclu", an "outcast", and that physical and mental disability, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, anti-social behaviour and poverty were the main factors for exclusion (Davies, 2005, p. 4). Burchardt et al. (1999, p. 231) compiled a list of activities (consumption activity, savings activity, production activity, political activity and social activity) deemed normal and essential for ordinary citizens and defined social exclusion as inefficiency of those activities.

The concept of social exclusion has taken on varied but similar meanings in different parts of the world. Social exclusion in developed countries has mostly referred to the poor and immigrant classes which generally correspond to the bottom socioeconomic rungs and constitute the majority in these societies (Sujatmiko, 2011, p. 186). However, there are two types of social exclusion not

included within this conceptual framework. The first is negative social inclusion, such as involvement or participation in illicit networks like the mafia or similar criminal organization. The second group, as Giddens (1998, p. 103) identifies, is voluntary exclusion, such as those who occupy higher social or economic statuses and may live in privileged ghettos and withdraw themselves from public education and health.

Social exclusion theory and the role of the state in facilitating social integration have oscillated between two margins. Davies argues that, “For philosophers of the libertarian right, such as Hayek (1944), market outcomes are inviolable and represent a proxy for social justice equalities of opportunity and outcomes are of no concern. In this view, social exclusion need not trouble government, whose duty is to maintain the minimal state to enforce a level playing field in market competition and guard against internal and external enemies” (Davies, 2005, p. 7). However, a different perspective holds that, “We should break the link between the right to an income and the obligation to earn or use it in ways consistent with the economic and cultural hegemony of capitalism” (Bowring, 2000, p. 307).

Between these two poles, one of the most popular conceptualization of social exclusion comes from Levitas (1998), who put forward three discourses, on the field. The first one is integrationist discourse, abbreviated as SID (social integrated discourse), which stresses the role of (re)integrating into the market those people who were unemployed or out of the workforce. This argument holds that through employment policies and personal responsibility, it is possible to ensure the integration of excluded individuals. Neoliberal scholars and political actors are some of the strongest defenders of the SID stream of thought, and international organisations, such as the World Bank, also often reflect a similar perspective (p. 5). The second discourse is the redistributionist discourse (RED), also known as the poverty approach, which highlights low incomes and insufficient material resources as main causes of poverty. “In this view, social exclusion is caused by the workings of capitalist economies and therefore ‘les exclus’ cannot be blamed for their predicament. They are expelled rather than excluded” (Davies 2005, p. 6). Thirdly, the moral underclass discourse (MUD) places the blame on the very individuals who are excluded, seeing their predicament as a moral failing.

Social capital theory offered by Putnam (1993, pp. 35-42; 1995, pp. 65-78) explains social exclusion as a result of deficiencies of social capital, and identifies mechanisms that increase social capital as the “antidote” for social exclusion. Putnam (1993, pp. 35-42; 1995, pp. 65-78) defines social capital based on four

common characteristics found in communities: the existence of community networks, civic participation in community networks, a sense of communal identity, solidarity and equality within the community; and norms of trust and reciprocal help and support.

Policy Axis from Poverty to Social Inclusion

The relationship between being poor and socially excluded is widely accepted, but the degree and the causality of that relation has long been debated (Room, 1999, pp. 1-9). Governments have shown to accept various general approaches of social exclusion, from selective and poverty-oriented understandings to a universal and inclusive perspective, and the literature has evolved accordingly.

The mechanisms and rationales governments across the globe have used to develop policies for disadvantaged groups have transformed over time. At the first, governments tended to target social protection policies only at the poor. Bradshaw (2001, p. 2) summarized the evolution of basing policies from minimum income and basic needs approach to relative poverty and deprivation as follows, “The minimum budget standards approach dominated conceptions of poverty in the first half of this century. However, in the second half, a wider range of methods has been developed to establish thresholds, many in response to the advance in our conceptual understanding of poverty, not as an absolute or physical lack of basic necessities, but as a socially determined or relative lack of resources, as relative deprivation”. In other words, whereas the right to social assistance was largely based on an individual or family’s deprivation, more recently, the right to assistance has become increasingly based on citizenship. Social protection offered to all citizens on a more universal scale has created a more integrative policy atmosphere.

Social Funds for Social Inclusion

In the Second International Conference on Social Funds, the World Bank defines social funds as “funds [that] directly finance small community-managed projects, helping to empower the poor and vulnerable by allowing them to become actively involved in their own development” (World Bank, 2000, p. 1).

To increase social/human capital and support efforts to ensure social inclusion, social funds have been extensively implemented in both developed and developing countries. Across the board, social funds have been used not only to increase social capital and social inclusion, but also for physical investment. Social fund literature

is growing in parallel with the amount of funds being created and the number of projects initiated. According to J. van Domelen (2002) beginning in the 1980s over 60 countries established social funds in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Such funds have been preferred by governments because of the potential to converge local knowledge and ownership and build up central technical capacity and resources (pp. 627-642).

As Faguet and Wietzke (2006) suggest “social funds are typically organized as autonomous public entities outside existing line ministries or public work agencies and report directly to the president or a privileged minister (such as of planning or the prime minister) with a coordinating role. Their financial support to communities mostly consists of grants” (p. 1). Citing a number of positive examples (Peru by Paxson and Schady 2002, Mali, Tajikistan and Mongolia by Marcus 2002, Bolivia by Newman et al), Faguet and Wietzke claim that social funds are more dynamic than conventional ministries and public works agencies. Similarly, J. van Domelen (2002, pp. 627-642) cites a six-country study that includes over 21,000 treatment households and several controls, and shows that social funds are better targeted to the poor than other government programs in terms of responding to important local needs.

However, social funds have also been criticized for having no structural effect on poverty, inequality or social inclusion. Critics claim that like other poverty reduction efforts, social funds are merely a temporary patch for current social problems in a capitalist mode of production. Such critique is based on Marxist tenets that accuse the nature of capitalist production to be the very generator of structural inequalities (Davies, 2005, p. 5).

SODES Program

Turkey’s social policy framework and recent developments in this field are summarised here to contextualize the emergence of SODES. Following the deep economic crisis of 2001 and ensured political stability, social policy in Turkey gained political importance, and policy instruments developed and diversified while institutional capacity strengthened.

According to press releases by the Turkish Statistics Institute and annual reports from the MoD, progress has been observed in social policies targeting education. Between 2002 and 2012, enrolment rates across the board rose in preschools, as well as primary, secondary and tertiary schools, including those enrolled in distance learning programs for higher education. Preschool education enrolment

rates saw an increase from 10.5% to 46.5%, while primary school enrolment grew from 100.4% to 108.4%, secondary from 70.9% to 92.6%, and tertiary from 28.7% to 81.6% (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2007, pp. 190-195, Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2003, pp. 139-144). However, the same progress has not been ensured in terms of indicators for the quality of education. Among OECD countries, Turkey scored the second lowest (before Mexico) on the Program for International Student Assessment survey results.

Health indicators also performed similarly well in that period. The infant mortality rate decreased from 37.4% to 12.2%, and life expectancy at birth increased from 68.8 years to 78.5 years, while the total fertility rate fell from 2.47 to 2.1 children (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2007, pp. 198-201, Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2003, pp. 144-149).

Thanks to macro-economic development and active employment strategies, unemployment decreased from 10.6% in 2002 to 9.1% in 2012, a comparatively modest improvement. Youth unemployment decreased from 19.2% to 18.1% in that same time frame (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2007, pp. 180-184, Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2003, pp. 161-165).

A steady decrease in inflation and interest rates, a rise in per capita income from \$2,662 to \$10,673, and greater government social assistance funds, from 0.50% to 1.18% of GDP, resulted in a sharp decline in poverty indicators. The percentage of the population living at the under \$2.15 per day threshold and the under \$4.30 per day threshold fell from 3.04% to 0.14% and from 30.30% to 2.79%, respectively, between 2002 and 2012. Despite the improvement illustrated in these figures, child poverty remains an acute problem in Turkey with 33.6% (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2007, pp. 204-208, Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2003, pp. 159-161). The Gini coefficient income distribution indicator remained stable at around 0.40. Income and Life Conditions Survey in 2011 showed that 18.5% of the population in Turkey is at risk of permanent poverty, measured as the rate of the population that lives below the median income in that year and for at least two years within the previous three years (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2012a).

Despite the prior positive developments in social policy, the need for a project-based grant program emerged for a few reasons. Firstly, public institutions, especially in the least developed regions, were inflexible and slow in responding to the fast changing social environment, and some on-going ministry programs had proven ineffective in ensuring social inclusion because of their failure to adapt to local contexts and needs. Secondly, internal migration patterns began

to change in the 1990s, as people preferred to settle in emerging big cities such as Diyarbakır, Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa in the south-eastern parts of the country, rather than Turkey's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Consequently, the concentration and pattern for social integration demand shifted with the population movement. Furthermore, in addition to poverty and the lack of social capital in the southeast and eastern regions of Turkey, ethnic-based separatist movements and military conflict throughout the 1980s and 1990s served to weaken social integration and blocked healthy and normal state-society relations.

In response to the criticism that the decision-making process for public policies in Turkey are too centralized and not sensitive to local needs, the MoD designed the SODES program to be based on local actors' decisions. Under this program, the MoD does not decide the projects, and local actors plan their own initiatives while the Ministry provides financing and monitors the projects.

The Program was launched in nine provinces as part of the regional development program, the Southeast Anatolian Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, GAP¹). Two years following its implementation in GAP region and positive feedbacks, MoD expanded the gradually the coverage to 30 less developed provinces Turkey. Between 2008 and 2012, approximately 400 million USD were allocated to 5,792 projects within that scope.

SODES versus Current Poverty Reduction Programs

SODES differs from other poverty reduction programs because of its emphasis on social inclusion and its approach to categorization of the poor and/or disadvantaged. Classical poverty alleviation programs tend to set benchmark levels, such as income levels or the provision of basic needs, like food, clothing and shelter. However, this approach is based on a hierarchy of necessities and ignores social needs, inevitably failing to provide sufficient resources to ensure equal opportunities.

Under the SODES program, activities are not defined as appropriate or inappropriate for the disadvantaged or poor community. The only criterion is that the activity or project has the potential to foster social integration and boost social

¹ The Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) is an integrated regional development effort which covers 9 less developed provinces in the basins of the Euphrates and Tigris. The GAP had originally been planned in the 70s consisting of projects for irrigation and hydraulic energy production but transformed into a multi-sector social and economic development program for the region in the 80s.

capital. The project coordinator is free to choose any activity demanded by the community and deemed to support social inclusion.

The perspective of the SODES program reflects Amartya Sen's capability approach, in which he argues for a shift in the mentality of social development from "giving people what they need" to "preparing the conditions of an expansion in [the] freedom of choice" for poor/disadvantaged populations (as cited in Buğra and Keyder, 2005, p. 4). The program does not give material benefits to the beneficiaries, but provides them with the opportunities and facilities to implement their own projects and realize their own choices. According to Sen (1999, p. 74), the fundamental motivation in social inclusion policy should be to develop the human capabilities that ensure real and valued freedoms, rather than merely focus on the provision of primary goods and utilities, which Sen calls "commodity fetishism" (Sen, 1987, p. 18). Sen claims that society must work to eliminate both active exclusion, such as the inability of immigrants to participate in political processes, and passive exclusion, such as unintentional deprivation (as cited in Haan, 2000, p. 31). As such, in addition to the resources allocated by Turkey's Ministry of Family and Social Policies, a social inclusion program like SODES was needed to combat both passive and active exclusion and increase human capabilities in the region.

A Flexible Mechanism in a Highly Centralised Government Structure

The basic rationale in establishing SODES was to address the inability or failure of provincial public services to rapidly and effectively attend the acute social problems of the less developed regions. Turkey's administrative structure remains highly centralized, and a project-based framework with flexible mechanisms to respond to social needs, especially in disadvantaged regions, was in need. With a vision to increase the system's flexibility, the Ministry sees SODES as a "capillary vessel [for] public social services" serving a complimentary function – rather than a rival or substitution – in helping the government reach out to the socially excluded. To be sure, the emphasis is not on poverty alone, but also on social cohesiveness. As such, any activity – including those targeting more affluent segments of society – is supported, so long as it facilitates social integration. The flexibility of the SODES program is based on an open-ended nature of the projects it funds and its responsive nature to social needs.

Flexibility in SODES Project Offices

Under the guidance of the Ministry of Development, governorships have formed autonomous SODES offices that fall directly under the province governor. The offices are staffed either by appointed civil servants, or by hiring expert individuals on temporary contracts. The average SODES office has 5 to 8 personnel, with an office size changing depending on province and its population size. The Ministry of Development allocates and provides funding to support the local SODES presence, including allowances for private offices, employee salaries, and private car hires for on-site visits.

Flexibility in the content of the projects

As an administrating central government organization, the Ministry of Development has set basic principles and framework of the SODES program. The arrangement allows any local/provincial institution (save private enterprises) to design and submit any project application that supports social integration. To further facilitate the program and its flexibility, applications can be made online via an intuitive system that allows applicants to customize their proposals and that favours the checking of boxes over extensive text writing. The application system also includes an automatic budget calculator based on inputted figures. This system was created to differentiate from European Union or similar Development Agency² grant programs that require extensive text or the use of consultancy firms.

Flexibility during implementation

Once the project is being implemented, the project coordinator may change the activities and/or the budget accordingly, except for main aim of the project. The main aim or one of the basic components of the project can only be changed with the approval of the SODES office.

Measuring the SODES Impact

The results and evaluations included in this article are based on fieldwork conducted by the Ministry of Development in 2012 across 30 provinces to study the impact of the SODES program. MoD later published a comprehensive impact

² 26 Development Agencies have been established within the framework of EU process on regional basis aiming to ensure a regional development approach by managing grant programs and producing analytical studies and policy papers.

assessment³ of the study, the findings of which this article will evaluate and use to form policy recommendations for managing social funds.

Quantitative research was conducted only in nine provinces in the GAP region that had administered the SODES program for five years. The study surveyed 1809 project beneficiaries and 976 potential beneficiaries throughout those provinces. Potential beneficiaries are those have the same social and demographic characteristics as beneficiaries and live in the same neighbourhoods but not attended any SODES project. Interviewees were selected randomly from beneficiary records in the provincial SODES office and SODES ICT system. The sample is weighted so as to represent a better range of the population of the provinces and across project categories. Beneficiaries outside of the GAP region were not surveyed as programs in those areas had been running for less than two years, a time frame what was deemed too short to yield any significant analytical results. Qualitative research (18 focus groups discussions and 124 in-depth interviews) was conducted with beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, provincial SODES office staff, deputy governors and project coordinators.

Results

Beneficiary Profiles

While the average unemployment rate in Turkey is 9%, it is 11% in the GAP region, and 14% among beneficiaries. Among working households 90% works at low skill and unskilled jobs. The percentage of household beneficiaries among SODES participants who have completed at least secondary education is less than 10% (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013a, p. 114). These figures illustrate the program's targeting of the most disadvantaged groups.

Local SODES project operators displayed a high preference for projects aimed at youth. Roughly 80% of project beneficiaries surveyed were under 25, while the under 25 population makes up only 57% of the region's inhabitants. Uneducated adult women made up the second-largest category of beneficiaries whose primary responsibilities are childcare and household duties.

Expectations of beneficiaries from the projects are value leisure time (25%), increase school performance (22.6%), greater knowledge and self-awareness

³ Published report in Turkish can be found on the website: http://www.kalkinma.gov.tr/sodes/SODES'in_Degerlendirilmesi_Arastirmasi_Raporu.pdf

(19.8%), preparedness for high school or university entrance exams (16.3%) and vocational training (14.2%) (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013a, p. 163).

Project Types

Among project types, education-based initiatives were the most prevalent. Of the beneficiaries of those projects, 65% were current students at different levels of education (primary, secondary, high) (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013a, p. 59). Although all levels of education are free of charge in Turkey, the main barriers to education are the entrance exams to some schools at the secondary level, and to all higher education institutions at the university level. Most SODES education projects aimed to support students by providing study centres where they can study in a warm and private environment, close to home and with free tutoring help and guidance ahead of the entrance exams.

Local SODES project actors mainly targeted school-aged children with the aim of boosting students' success on national exams. As a result, the education level of beneficiaries is higher than the education level of the region. The average illiteracy rate throughout the region stood at 9.3%, but drops to 3.7% for SODES project beneficiaries (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013a, p. 114). These indicators demonstrate local project operators' priority in ensuring equal access of opportunity and progress for younger and future generations, rather than directly targeting the poor or inequality based on socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, these figures may also be interpreted as demonstrating the lack of access on behalf of the illiterate (i.e., the most disadvantaged populations) to the majority of SODES education programs.

The second most popular project type is the centres for women, which are given different names based on their location and types of services, such as "women centres", "women houses", and "women cafes". For the most part, women come and go from these facilities as they please, and there is no formal registration or minimum attendance obligation. These centres typically provide a number of services, such as handcrafts, childcare, family communication coaching, hygiene, vocational education and awareness raising activities.

From the administrative side, less than 10% of project coordinators are female. Although the program has reached women as beneficiaries to a large extent, it is difficult to say that women were also crucial actors at the program organization level.

The Projects Are In Line With Local Demand and Satisfaction of

Beneficiaries

Without mentioning the scope of the SODES program, beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries were asked in the survey to identify the most pressing challenges in the regions in which they live. The problems that received the highest mentions were unemployment (22.5%), physical infrastructure (14.5%), poverty (9.8%) and education (8.9%) (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013a, p. 263). The first two problems are not within the scope of program and there are other social programs that address them. The third and fourth problems are considered primary focus areas of the SODES program.

Overall, 83.7% of beneficiaries said they satisfied or highly satisfied with the project they attend. Only 6% of respondents claimed to have had a negative experience participating in a SODES project (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013a, p. 218). High satisfaction rates can be interpreted as an indicator of successful project design and implementation, or as the result of beneficiaries' low expectation levels.

Outreach

Responses to the survey question given to beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, "*How did you first hear about SODES?*" indicates that schools were the best channel for reaching out to target populations. Schools accounted for 49.3% of the first-instance encounter with the SODES program, while the family-friend-neighbour channel made up 30.4% (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013a, p. 133). These numbers indicate that mass media was either not used effectively or did not have an impact on the target population.

Social Exclusion is an "Urban Phenomenon"

Local actors preferred to design and implement projects in the urban areas with 87%. This figure can be interpreted in two ways. First, local actors targeted social exclusion in urban areas because problems related to social exclusion are more acute and visible in urban settings. Second, project preparation and implementation capacity are better developed in urban areas, and so urban projects gained more importance in project profile. Grant program announcements, easy access to provincial SODES offices and the institutional capacity of organizations in city centres greatly boosted the number of project applications, quality of submitted

projects and successful implementations in those areas. A third explanation may be attributed to a combination of the two effects.

Changing Perceptions and Boosting Enrolment

Like local public officials and SODES staff and program coordinators, families also believe in the value of education projects. About 88% of beneficiary families agreed to involve their children in education related programs that encouraged school attendance, but on the condition that the program compensate the family for any reduced income once the child leaves work for school or a study centre.

Of the education project beneficiaries surveyed, 52% said that their success levels at school had improved. In addition to supporting studies directly, efforts such as providing accommodation, compensating families when a child goes to school instead of work have contributed to rising enrolment rates, especially of girls. In addition to the quantitative evidence of rising enrolment rates for girls, qualitative evaluations show that perceptions on educating female children are changing as well. Mothers of beneficiaries have reported that their husbands now believe that their girls can succeed and should go to school.

The Program Increased the Project Preparation and Implementation

Capacity of Local Actors

The percentage of GAP Region benefitting from the EU Funds has increased after the program, according to SODES office staff observations. The local government staff declared that they also applied more professional methods to implement and monitor the projects. Deputy governors in provinces declared that in that process, the projects performed within the framework of SODES also improved in terms of variety of activities, cost-benefit effectiveness and targeting the most appropriate segments of society.

Project Based Working Style Has Expanded

Both the working style of provincial government offices and NGOs has changed to better meet beneficiary needs and used project cycle approaches. Provincial offices have developed their own styles and additional information and communication technology programs. In some cases, project coordinators have used reporting

systems and styles that have even exceeded the technicality and detail required or expected by the MoD. For example, some local project administrators had prepared provincial project manuals covering priorities in terms of neighbourhoods and activities. A few provincial offices began using online correspondence systems to maintain daily communication with project coordinators. Social media tools were also used at the organizational and administrative level to facilitate coordination between administrators, coordinators and beneficiaries where they shared their experiences about overcoming problems in project implementation. The program also promoted the establishment of new NGOs and courage the current ones.

Policy Implications

Reaching the most disadvantaged segments

Projects and services should be supply driven rather than demand driven. Applying to an institution, even if its services are free of charge, necessitates some courage, money and knowledge. Even though all SODES services are free of charge, often the most disadvantaged segments of society are either hesitant or have lack of knowledge for accessing them. Home visits have encouraged beneficiaries and ensured trust in projects. In the survey, 31% of beneficiary respondents said that they had attended the project after being directly invited. As such, the program's ability to directly overcome outreach obstacles helps increase its scope.

For the disadvantaged, projects should take place within walking distance of the home. Survey results show an 88% beneficiary approval rate of project locations. In-depth interviews reveal that the most disadvantaged do not attend public programs even if they are free of charge because of transportation costs, lack of permission on part of the husband, or hesitation.

For the potential project implementers/coordinators in disadvantaged neighbourhoods procedures should be kept very simple. SODES has a short five-page user-friendly modular application system that presents list of options according to choices. The applicant writes a short summary of the intended activities and then simply clicks on options rather than preparing professional budgets and timetables. Both project coordinators and office staff agreed on the simplicity of the process, and emphasize the positive effect of not requiring foreign language during project preparation phase (when they are comparing to EU Projects).

Empathy is a strong instrument for accessing the most disadvantaged groups. Satisfaction with the “attitude of project staff” was the most highly ranked satisfaction indicator among program beneficiaries (87.6%). Project staff is from the region, and most comes from disadvantaged neighbourhoods themselves. In in-depth interviews, project staff has expressed that one of the most motivating factors for them is the feeling of empathy with the beneficiaries. Although project staff receives a modest wage, they generally describe their roles as voluntary work.

Centre-periphery balance in management

Centre-periphery balance in implementation should be ensured. SODES Offices have a sort of autonomy. Under normal circumstances, all government officials are staff of provincial directorates and provincial directors are responsible against the governor. In the case of SODES, office staff works directly with the governor. MoD allocates a certain amount to pay an extra allowance for the extra workload of office staff. MoD regularly organizes evaluation meetings for all provincial SODES office staff at the centre to ensure experience sharing.

Local and central government balance prevents nepotism. Local authorities check for eligibility and eliminate inappropriate projects. Central authorities rate the projects through independent project evaluators. This dual evaluation system blocks and eliminates the unfair or biased appropriation of resources.

The designer and implementer of the projects are the same persons/actors. Like other public programs, social funds are also being criticized for not responding to local demands effectively. Typically, investment and project decisions are shaped by the ministries at the capital and implemented in provinces. However, as described above, in creating the SODES program, the Ministry of Development only defines the broad scope of the project, and leaves it to local actors design and implement projects in their entirety.

Coordination among public institutions should be improved. Disadvantaged families generally live multiple vulnerabilities at the same time. Disability, nonattendance at school, poverty, and awareness raising are all issues addressed separately by various institutions that generally lack coordination. As such, even free of charge public services may be inaccessible due to some cultural or societal exclusion factors. Public authorities should consider the needs of individuals as a whole, as done in the formulation of many SODES projects.

The Ministry of National Education, for example, has public education centres in all provinces across the country. However, these centres often cater only to

the middle or lower-middle class, even if their services are provided free of charge. A woman wishing to attend such a centre would need to find a temporary caretaker for her children and have enough money (even if only a little) to pay for utensils and materials like yarn or ceramic. SODES projects, especially training initiatives, generally cover additional expenses, and there are almost always free on-site childcare services while the mother is in training. In asking SODES program beneficiaries what they preferred about the SODES projects, one of the most frequent answers during the qualitative interviews pointed to the supportive instruments provided to participants in these initiatives as a primary advantage.

Measuring and considering latent outcomes

Latent outcomes have been more effective than manifest outcomes in the program. When designing, managing and evaluating the social funds and projects, it is highly likely that secondary (latent) outcomes are stronger than primary (manifest) outcomes. Sometimes those outcomes are labelled as unintended (but not unwanted) consequences. In the case of SODES projects, secondary outcomes may be intended at the outset, but they may be neither easily formulated during a project's drafting nor easily measured at the end. A strong example is tailoring training projects targeting women living in shantytowns. While the MoD does not require any added components to projects dealing with women living in such areas, a number of best-practice guides exist, such as taking into consideration the need for childcare during program activities.

In the case of training projects for sewing and tailoring, the primary outcome is to increase the capacity for women to be employed as tailors. A crude evaluation indicator of such projects may be the percentage of women who are employed after the project. In that project that is less than 2%. According to that criterion, the project may be deemed unsuccessful. But a qualitative perspective provides further insight, highlighting latent outcomes, such as giving women the opportunity to do something outside the house, sewing for a family's own needs, increasing a participant's confidence in the state/society, the feeling of being protected. Furthermore, like all SODES projects, the tailoring initiative has attendant benefit modules, such as seminars on hygiene, childcare, inner family communication, and guidance.

The following results also show the need for qualitative analyse because beneficiaries emphasize psychological benefits very often of which are not primary aims of projects. In-depth interviews conducted with women beneficiaries

pointed that to have a social network other than family and next door neighbours contributed to remove feeling worthless, lacking self-esteem, depression, unsocial behaviour and even suicide tendency. Besides social networking daily allowance given to the beneficiaries also strengthened them psychologically because most of the beneficiary woman “gained” her money for the first time in their life.

Beneficiaries were asked to point out the benefits they derived from participating in the SODES project. The benefit mentioned most frequently, at 28%, was “having new friends and being social”. Beneficiaries also agreed at a rate of 88% that the SODES projects increased their self-esteem vis-à-vis society and the state. In depth interviews prove that success stories of previous beneficiaries created model characters in the neighbourhoods. This outcome is visible in education projects which aim to increase success in nationwide student exams. There are individual examples who are the first university students from that neighbourhood. Those examples motivate the beneficiary students. The importance of secondary, especially emotional, outcomes is not just a by-product of project. Some beneficiaries state that they attend the projects for the explicit purpose of socialising (12%) and increasing their self-esteem (10%).

Sustainability

Like all project-based programs, the sustainability of the SODES program has been questioned since the beginning, as most projects are not income generating and therefore unsustainable by nature. Sustainability can be ensured via three main instruments:

First, maintaining local satisfaction is the key, and demand will encourage the government and MoD to continue funding the program or similar initiatives. Satisfaction according to the self-evaluation of beneficiaries is 84%, and beneficiaries are regularly attending the programs. Low levels of non-attendance reported by project coordinators are an indication of the support and trust in the program.

Second, increasing the awareness of local authorities on issues surrounding social exclusion ensures that the program’s aims become integrated within the framework of local policymaking. Governorships have flexible funds for provincial development, although in the past these funds have mostly been used for physical investment, such as building roads, hospitals, schools and irrigation. In a survey

of deputy governors in the region, 66% said that they would be able to sustain SODES projects even if the Ministry stopped providing funding.

Third and most important is giving feedback to ministries such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Most of the SODES projects provide similar services to those offered by line ministries but with additional components to ensure and support the attendance of the most disadvantaged members of society. If the MoD succeeds in providing the necessary feedback to related ministries and government agencies reflecting the lessons learned from the SODES program experience, it is hoped that routine public services will also begin to address issues that inhibit full social inclusion.

Weaknesses

In the interviews, beneficiaries also pointed out some weak points of the program. Of beneficiaries surveyed, 19.9% expressed dissatisfaction with the duration of projects. This stems from the fact that SODES projects are not allowed to be continued for more than 12 months. And although successful projects are generally accepted in the following year, as a result of the term limit, project coordinators often feel uncomfortable investing in long-term goals or projects given the unpredictable environment.

Another highlighted dissatisfaction is the circulation of administrative staff. The turnover for project coordinators may be high due to government staff mobility in the region. Government staff members in the region are typically serving compulsory missions for the first years of their services ahead of promotion. Once staff members gain the right to change provinces, they generally prefer to leave for more developed provinces. From the perspective of the office staff, the main problem is temporary individual contracts of SODES office staff.

At the provincial level, project selection/filtration processes are not based on written rules, and consequently rejected project applicants may question the objectivity of evaluations. Role sharing between the ministry and provincial offices, especially in the project selection phase, complicates the follow-up the process for applicants.

Another risk or weakness of the program is the potential for a stigmatising effect. Often, SODES staff in the ministry and in the provincial offices uses jargons of social exclusion – such as “socially excluded”, “poor”, “disadvantaged”,

“pushed aside”, “marginal” – in meetings and in written documents. The use of such vocabulary spreads from top to bottom and eventually filters to project coordinators and even the beneficiaries themselves.

Finally, the program was unsuccessful in sufficiently mobilising female project coordinators at the local level. Although most projects directly target women, and those projects tend to be prioritised during the selection process, there are few woman project coordinators in the region. At the time of the program’s evaluation, 1 out of 10 projects had a woman project coordinator.

Conclusion

Following the 2002 general elections in Turkey, political and economic stability and commitment to social policy led to significant progress in education, health, employment and poverty indicators. Although direct social assistance payments to the poor have increased and poverty levels sharply declined, more delicate social policies were needed to increase the poor and other disadvantaged segments of society (immigrants to big cities, seasonal agricultural workers etc.) to integrate to society by increasing their social and human capital. As such, the SODES program was designed and implemented to carry out this aim by simulating European Union grant programs. However, unlike EU grant programs, one of the basic principles of SODES program was to be as simple as possible for applicants and coordinators. Furthermore, unlike typical poverty alleviation programs, SODES program takes a bottom-up approach to social inclusion by providing disadvantaged communities the opportunity and resources to develop their own projects, rather than being delivered centrally-planned, top-down programs.

Five years following the SODES program’s implementation, the MoD conducted a field qualitative and quantitative field survey in the 30 provinces where the initiative is held to evaluate the program’s overall impact, successes and weaknesses. This study has analysed some of the key findings of the ministry’s SODES assessment, concluding that:

- According to beneficiary and local administrators, the SODES program has positively contributed to greater social inclusion policy and has succeeded in reaching disadvantaged populations. The program has also increased the project preparation and implementation capacity of local actors. Education projects and projects for women centres have been the most popular type of projects in the SODES provinces.

- Flexibility of public programs and making room for local actors' decision are crucial elements for successful policy design. A delicate balance of roles and responsibilities between central and local public administrators provides the necessary conditions for using the central government's finance and expertise and local government's ownership and insights for identifying problems and applying resources towards a solution.
- To target the most disadvantaged segments of society, it is not enough to provide services free of charge. Public institutions should have a supply-oriented approach and reach out to target populations and individuals, even if they do not directly apply for programs. NGOs are potential mediators for this aim.
- When designing and evaluating social funds or social programs, secondary outcomes should be taken into consideration. Increasing self-esteem, hope and changing values and the socialization of beneficiaries have been some of the more prominent secondary outcomes experienced by beneficiaries in the SODES projects.
- Since the program has a flexible mechanism and does not have permanent institutional structure, sustainability of the program is weak. To ensure greater sustainability, communication and collaboration between local actors, NGOs and the central government should be strengthened, and any weaknesses should be addressed by using insights gained from survey results. For sustainable outcomes in similar fields, the ministries working on social policy issues can use the results of SODES program evaluation to reflect on the inputs and outcomes of their own initiatives.

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