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Marian Daragiu, chair
and
Ciprian Torj, senior consultant

Contribution of the Civil Society to the Roma Political Life

The disadvantaged situation of Roma it can be seen in all major sectors: social, economical, intercultural, interrelations, education, health, housing, employment, equal chances, equal treatment etc.

The Romanian Roma main actors have increased their actions in the last years trying to come up with specific but isolated solutions for the Roma deprived communities.

1. Most of the representatives of the civil society continue to focus their work at the grass roots level of the community throughout different local actions or projects.

More oriented on specialising their own NGO working teams, they make sure the community approaches are according with the community development theories. This way the civil society gain public recognition while their results are measurable and found in accordance with the donors policies. On the other hand the communities are rather pleased with their small steps toward life improvements (a better road in community, a more inclusive school, a painted fence etc.).

2. A small number of NGO`s started to enhance a more efficient approach of the Roma disadvantaged communities. They are more oriented on developing abilities and capacities for the community members, on assisting the community in conceiving and empower local action groups, mainly formed by the most willing and respected Roma community members. In this case the representative group is empowered to represent the voice of the community in relation with the external environment, including the local authorities.

This way the community representatives became more confident in their actions and gain the appreciation and legitimacy in relation with the Local Public Administration.

The both approaches are still suffering in long term results. In the first case, after the financed program has finished the Roma community found itself in a deep dependency by the specialists. There are no left any work instruments or trained leaders or any best practices to help them to continue the started initiatives.

In the second case, the legitimated Local Initiative Group found itself under the pressure, on one hand, **of the community members**, by their high level of expectations, to continue to work in a professional manner, as they did under the supervision of the NGO, and on the other hand, without a solid experience, they realise the lack of the support of the Local Public Administration.

Without any measurable results in practice, the Local Initiative Group starts to lose its self confidence and shortly ends by dissolution.

3. The Roma Civil Society has developed a hesitant attitude regarding the subject of political representation of the Roma Community.

In the present the main dilemma for most of the Nongovernmental organisations is either to support the community and teaching its members how to mobilise themselves for the next election campaign, the way that they should have their own representatives in local government, or to keep the traditional distance based on the well known theory” the NGO should not get involved in politics”

While the single Roma Party is focused on a top down approach the isolated Roma communities choose to trade their political power on goods and insignificant short term benefits.

Obviously there are no success receipts to be applied for the disadvantaged Roma community.

Although, based on the over 10 years experience of Ruhama Foundation, we consider the Roma communities in special and the Roma institutional actors in general, should focus on long term solutions such as:

1. The local and central government should be not only aware of the Roma situation, but in a very transparent way and public they should take over the responsibility for the deprived generalised level of life of the Roma ethnic citizens.
2. The non Roma political parties and the Government – should budget and implement the existing policies aimed to improve the Roma situation.
3. The Roma Civil Society should decide to support the Roma Communities in issues such as Civic Election Education, the importance of local political representation.
4. Civil Society should accompany their project results by supporting the Roma communities in identifying their political representatives and teach them strategies to become elected in the local councils.
5. The civil society should train the Roma local future counsellors in issues such as: negotiation, partnership, community representation, budget, community development, lobby and advocacy.