



Myers JDC
Brookdale

Supporting Local Authorities in the Provision of Social Services: An International Review

Nadav Penn

Editor: Revital Aviv Matok

English translation (Abstract and Executive Summary): Evelyn Abel

Graphic design: Efrat Speaker

The study was commissioned by the Budget Department of the Ministry of Finance
and funded with its assistance

Myers JDC Brookdale Institute

P.O.B. 3886, Jerusalem 9103702, Israel

Tel: 02-6557400

brookdale.jdc.org.il/en | brook@jdc.org

Jerusalem | December 2020

Abstract

Background

This review focuses on support mechanisms for local authorities (LAs) to improve the provision of social services as regards both quality and efficient delivery. The review covered selected OECD countries with LAs at various levels of autonomy. It was conducted in 2020 at the request of the Budget Department of the Ministry of Finance.

Goal

To identify optimal models, from around the world, of support mechanisms for LAs to improve the provision of education and welfare services, and explore if they are applicable to Israel.

Methodology

An international review was conducted of scholarly literature, official documents, and additional internet sources on the topic of LAs.

Main Findings

Few programs around the world rely on accompanying support as the main path to improving the provision of social services. The most common supportive tool in these programs is tailored organizational consultation or research. Nonetheless, there are methodical models of LA support. These programs largely pertain to support-management bodies serving a large number of LAs. Program implementation allows for variation between regions and LAs – amid retention of a common framework for all participant LAs. This document reviews two programs of organizational consultation and research (in Denmark and the EU), and two programs with methodical models for LA support (in Germany and England).

Optimal support processes were found to include steps to develop sustainable competence in the given LAs. To this end, considerable thought is devoted to the “day after” or phaseout stage of the program and funding. For instance, the German Lernen vor Ort – LvO Program (Learning Locally) defined the entire program up front as temporary and therefore created mechanisms to ensure long-term structural changes in the supported LAs, and the sharing of knowledge accumulated by NGOs and LAs throughout Germany.

In addition, an LA's evaluation and measurement capacity was found to be an important component of the development of managerial and administrative competence. Moreover, it emerged that LA managerial freedom and authority are necessary to the development of autonomous management skills – the LA should both be and feel like a partner to the decision-making in the supportive program in order that it, itself, develop these skills.

Finally, regional organizations, which are the basis of LA support in England, differ from but parallel Israel's regional clusters. Relatively few adjustments are thus needed to transpose the English model of LA support to Israel.

Executive Summary

Background

This review focuses on support mechanisms for local authorities (LAs) to improve the provision of social services, as regards both quality and efficient delivery. The supportive process, as defined in the review, ends when an LA has the capacity to provide social services on its own, within the existing legal framework. The programs reviewed here take steps to develop (managerial, professional) skills and/or to build suitable organizational infrastructure – without diffusing additional authority. The review was conducted in 2020 at the request of the Budget Department of the Ministry of Finance.

Goal

To identify optimal models, from around the world, of support mechanisms for LAs to improve the provision of education and welfare services, and explore if they are applicable to Israel.

Methodology

The international review covered scholarly literature, official documents and internet sources on the topic of LAs. The academic search engines used were Google Scholar and Web of Science for the following keywords - municipal management, decentralization and devolution, and capacity building. The review also relied on the OECD website, the websites of local and national LA centers, and LA networks.

The reviewed programs are from OECD countries, with LAs at various levels of autonomy: Germany (the German model) and Denmark (the Nordic model) where LAs possess immense autonomy, and England (the British / Anglo-Saxon model) where LAs possess relatively little autonomy. Also reviewed is a program from the EU, a supranational union in which member states enjoy prodigious autonomy.

Main Findings

A successful supportive process requires mutual trust between all the parties involved. In the case of LAs, there should be trust between the institutions of the central (or regional) government and those of the local government, regardless of the supportive model. In the absence of trust, the institutions of the central government find it difficult to accord authority and influence to those of the local government, while the latter find it difficult to develop the necessary skills for the exercise of authority.

The review revealed that very few programs rest on accompanying support as the main path to the improved provision of local social services, whereas training, peer learning, and institutional oversight are far more prevalent. We did, however, identify four supportive programs, which are discussed in this document.

Learning Locally (Lernen vor Ort – LvO), Germany

- LvO is a federal supportive program helping LAs in Germany to establish a measurement and evaluation apparatus for the local school system and, concomitantly, to develop the school system's managerial capacity.
- The basic assumption is that management requires knowledge of a situation, and the acquisition of knowledge requires evaluation and measurement skills.
- In the framework of LvO, and as part of the construction of local managerial competence, LAs are required to set up four municipal apparatuses in education – management, inspection, consultation, and transitions.
- Each apparatus has defined tasks that an LA must meet.
- To participate in the supportive program, LAs are required to enter into partnership with a local NGO for the program's implementation. The partner NGO is a professional body in the area of education. The type of partnership and assistance given may change subject to a joint decision of the NGO and the LA.
- Throughout the program, the LAs and NGOs are required to share in the dissemination of knowledge – between the LAs and NGOs, as well as with LAs outside of the project.
- Of the programs reviewed here, LvO has the most elaborate, methodical structure. Yet it grants the LAs great freedom of choice in how to achieve their aims.

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEP), England

- RIEP is a program enacted in England to improve, among other things, LA competence.
- The RIEPs numbered nine regional bodies that were established and active in England in 2008-11.
- Their role was to improve and streamline the work of LAs in the region through, among other things, supportive programs.
- The RIEPs dealt with a variety of areas including financial savings (e.g., regional bulk purchasing), skill building (knowledge-sharing capability, creation of joint databases), as well as individual assistance and support for LAs that scored low on the government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) tests.
- Each RIEP had its own annual strategic program, stipulating areas of activity for the coming year. The areas of activity had been negotiated between the RIEP and the local and central governments, and were determined in light of the national-governmental strategic program.

- The RIEP program rested on the assumption that the knowledge concerning LA work is to be found in the local rather than the national space. Thus, most of the authority for inspection and management in the program was accorded to the regional level and the roof-organization of LAs in England. The central government funded the establishment and operation of the RIEPs.
- Project emphasis was on reporting and sharing knowledge of the activities of both the supportive bodies and the supported LAs, notably in an annual report on the program.
- In some sense, the RIEPs were similar to Israel's regional clusters although they had broader influence and operated in a larger arena.

Intervention study around neighborhood renewal, Denmark

- In Copenhagen, a supportive intervention study was conducted for the purpose of organizational change at the municipality, to create improved delivery of local social services.
- The study was part of a neighborhood renewal project. In Denmark, neighborhood renewal applies to both the physical and the social dimensions.
- Unlike the other programs presented in this review, in this case, the demand and desire for change and reinforcement of the capacity to deliver quality social services came from the local government, and it commissioned the research team.
- The researchers closely followed the neighborhood renewal project, in the course, and light, of which they recommended structural changes in the work of the LA.
- The study comprised four components – preliminary research, identification of coordination problems, recommended solutions, and assimilation.
- The study focused on the identification of coordination problems, which constituted points of friction between municipal bodies, particularly between the municipality's different divisions (in Copenhagen, the different divisions are highly autonomous).
- These friction points were the basis of discussion with employees and managers in an effort to engender change in the LA's work.
- Following research and the (significant) involvement of employees and managers, negotiations were held with the managements of the municipality divisions for the assimilation of the changes deemed necessary in the study.
- The study led to the establishment of a horizontal organizational structure whereby the divisions cooperated according to local neighborhood needs. In the previous structure, each division had operated according to its own purview (a vertical organizational structure).

Strengthening the governance of the EU Cohesion Fund, European Union

- This supportive consultation study aimed to help (state and regional) bodies that receive earmarked funds from the EU, to improve their organizational structure and build managerial and administrative capabilities.
- The goal of the program was to help these bodies utilize the EU funds for various projects.
- At the time of writing, the program was in its pilot stage with the participation of five regional and national bodies receiving financial support from the EU as part of other projects (i.e., the bodies receive financial assistance for both their earlier projects and the supportive program reviewed here).
- The program is conducted by a team of experts from the OECD in partnership with EU experts.
- The program is composed of two stages – A) research; B) assimilation.
- Stage A will see the collection of data, the identification of difficulties in the utilization of EU funds and, finally, the composition of a roadmap for the development of managerial and administrative capabilities.
- The roadmap is to be written in conjunction with the experts and local staff of employees and managers. It should specify the changes necessary for improved management and utilization of funds, distinguishing between the short and long terms.
- Short-term changes are executed in the course of the program using program finances. Long-term changes are the responsibility of the supported LA and executed after the program ends, with no financial assistance from the EU.
- Stage B – the stage of assimilation – will see the implementation of the short-term decisions of the roadmap.
- Assimilation is conducted with, among other things, the use of the EU's capacity-building development tool.
- The EU maintains a common language for the development of capacity-building, which is used by some of its other tools.
- The common language makes it easier to implement the insights of Stage A (research) during Stage B (assimilation).
- The EU program is similar to the Danish one, apart from two essential differences:
 - The EU program offers a methodical, generic structure of accompanying research that can be transmitted to other LAs (as opposed to the unique, particularistic Danish program).
 - The EU program operates among bodies already receiving funding from the EU for a project, so that it is not a self-standing addition. This helps create commitment to the roadmap.

Additions and expansion of other tools unrelated to support for LAs

The research question defined at the start of the study sought to focus on accompanying support as a main tool for the improved delivery and quality of social services by an LA. However, throughout the work on this document, other examples of tools cropped up that are used for the same purpose. These are: Professional training (US), peer learning (Switzerland), and evaluation and measurement provisions (Chile and Norway).

Conclusion

Few programs around the world rest on accompanying support mechanisms as the main path to the improved delivery and quality of local social services. In those that do, the most common tool is tailored consultation or organizational research. It is difficult, though not impossible, to create a supportive program with a systematic blueprint for a large number of LAs (a “one-size fits all” approach); the process of LA support is delicate and complex, and often demands tailored adjustments to the needs of a particular LA. At the same time, as presented in this review, there are methodical models of accompanying LA support, such as the German and English programs. In these programs, the bodies directing the supportive processes are positioned in numerous LAs. The programs allow for variation in implementation between regions and LAs while retaining a common framework for all the participant LAs.

Optimal supportive processes take steps to develop sustainable capacities in the participant LAs – devoting considerable thought to the “day after” or phaseout. The German LvO Program, for example, well defined the phaseout stage – the entire program was defined up front as temporary, and mechanisms were created to ensure long-term structural changes in the supported LAs and dissemination of the knowledge accumulated.

Evaluation and measurement in an LA were found to be an important element in the development of managerial and administrative capacities. Similarly, managerial freedom and authority in an LA were found to be necessary to the development of autonomous managerial capacities, i.e., the LA should both be, and feel, like a partner in the decision-making of the supportive program so that it, itself, can develop these skills.

Finally, regional organizations, which are the basis of LA support in England, take the form of regional clusters in Israel. It should therefore be relatively easy to transpose the English model of LA support to Israel.