

Civil Society Organizations Providing Health Care in Guinea Bissau

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This paper deals with the civil society organizations (CSO) acting as health care providers in Guinea-Bissau. The role of CSO, including both NGOs and civil society associations, has clearly improved in the past two decades and they are today recognized as major actors in social care in developing countries. As international donors and stakeholders considered these organisms to have a comparative advantage in reaching local communities and presenting short term results, CSO were able to get access to important funds for their work. In several African countries CSO have competed with, and sometimes substituted, public health services, a concurrency that attracted severe criticism from the observers whether recognizing the importance of these new actors in healthcare. While several case studies point out how this interrelation was minoring and consuming the already weak public health services, attracting their professionals and promoting fast developed projects that were difficult to coordinate at a national level and compromised the broader goals of the health system, literature recognizes the improvement of health care due to NGO activity. In Guinea-Bissau, a country that have for long been dependent on NGOs activities that become the main health providers in the countryside, scarcity also conducted local associations to act as social care providers, particularly in healthcare. Most of these associations have been formed within the migrant communities in Europe and maintain a strong local or national commitment, mirrored in the work of the over 50 Guinean associations based solely in Portugal that range from local associations to religious and professional ones. However, their role as health providers is less known as they act in a more limited sphere and don't have the same access to funding as NGOs. This paper follows the actions of some of these associations and aims at discussing their actions as health providers, questioning how their activities are promoting a transnational movement of persons, goods and knowledge that is slowly reconfiguring local populations health choices in Guinea-Bissau.