



SHAPING GLOBALIZATION FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND FOOD SECURITY

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

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Globalization is generally perceived as a fundamental change in human interactions, but precisely what has changed and how it has changed are matters of contention. Some maintain that the changes are mainly related to the emergence of transnational economic and political organizations, while others emphasize the role of dramatic improvements in communications—with the Internet, mobile phones, and satellite networks shrinking space and time. Although some argue that globalization is economically driven, its political, cultural, and technological processes are equally important. Globalization is a complex, contradictory process that simultaneously involves increased diversity and homogenization, fragmentation and integration, and localism/regionalism and internationalism. This brief illustrates some of these contradictions as they have emerged in the areas of democracy, social capital, and social movements in developing countries, emphasizing their relationship with poverty and food security.

DEMOCRACY AND GLOBALIZATION

Democracy is important for food security in a number of ways—it helps ensure a government's commitment to famine prevention, for example. India's success in conquering its vulnerability to famines has been attributed to two key elements: a vigilant press (to disseminate information about impending food crises) and free elections (to ensure the government's accountability to its electorate). Recent research has also documented the positive impact of democracy on declines in child malnutrition.

Democracy has made remarkable progress during the past 30 years, especially in the developing world—a change that has been strongly influenced by the evolution of global communications. Authoritarian regimes, based on control of information, have no future in a framework of open communication: access to information helps citizens gain greater awareness and enables increased participation.

But not all information is equally helpful, nor do all actors have equal access to information resources. Consequently, different groups of people have different opportunities to mobilize and to make their voices heard. Information technologies mainly are designed for developed countries, making it hard for poor people in developing countries to benefit from them because they lack the necessary literacy and live mostly in rural areas, where telecommunication facilities are far less available than in urban areas. Poor women benefit even less than poor men. Such exclusion means that the poor are at risk of being cut off from the global conversation.

There is also increasing concern that the new wave of democracy might face reversals, as indicated by the recent rise

of populism in some countries in Latin America and Asia, and the persistence of single political parties in parts of Africa.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND GLOBALIZATION

Social capital is a type of social organization based on networks with common norms and mutual trust that pursue common goals. Studies in different developing countries show that societies with strong social capital tend to do well economically and can reduce their poverty levels. In addition, several studies on rural development have shown that indigenous or locally created associations can be essential for growth as well as food security. Globalization affects social capital in multiple ways, and the question is whether societies gain or lose from increased exposure to external forces and ideas. Some societies may lose traditional values, norms, and networks without making further progress. In other societies, new practices brought by globalization may transform “dysfunctional” traditional groups into more productive ones.

A study of an industrial sector in Kerala, India, illustrates the successful establishment of new social capital influenced by global ideologies such as democracy at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, the state government transformed the traditional vertical political structure into a more horizontal network and encouraged social mobilization by creating strong and effective legal systems. With this governmental support, the power of the lower class at the micro level was strengthened through labor unions and class mobilization. This contributed significantly to transforming traditional relationships with the local elite and improving the welfare of the poor.

Another example of an effective social network is the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which operates in Gujarat, India. SEWA began by organizing textile workers, then applied and modified the lessons learned to mobilize women in the informal sector, helping them achieve some power over their work situation. Its efforts bring together three movements: the labor movement, the cooperative movement, and the women's movement. SEWA's philosophy vis-à-vis globalization is pragmatic, supporting trade liberalization in some cases and opposing it in others, depending on whether the effects are beneficial or damaging to the poor.

In the case of SEWA and similar initiatives, the availability of the Internet and other new communication technologies has played a crucial role in promoting effective participation of the poor. These experiences show that there are ways of putting the new technologies to work for the poor.



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Grameen Telecom, a branch of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, provides another good example. Founded in 1996, Grameen Telecom has sought to make telephone service available throughout Bangladesh. It does this by loaning money for the purchase of cellular phones to women recruited from among the Grameen Bank's borrowers. After the women purchase a phone on credit, they make telephone service available to an entire village, charging villagers for phone use. The project helps the rural poor of Bangladesh not only by providing better access to information, but also by offering low-income women good opportunities for income generation.

GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Environmental changes, fluctuations in the global economy, and developments in global technologies do not respect the boundaries of nations. Nations remain powerful, but because of global forces there are large gaps opening up between their governments and citizens. This makes sovereignty a fuzzy concept.

Much of the current debate on globalization and social movements focuses on the concept of a global civil society—a society in which networks and movements provide a voice for individuals in the global arena. Referring mainly to independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and to social movements that operate across national boundaries, the concept and the forms it embodies are viewed by some as the necessary response to a more globalized world.

The term civil society is often associated with the ability to control the circumstances in which individuals live and the substantive empowerment of citizens. But do these new global forms of organizing allow the poorest countries—and, more importantly, the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in a country—to have equal participation in civil society? Globalization offers conflicting opportunities to social movements. On the one hand, it provides them with significant new possibilities and resources for influencing both state and nonstate actors. On the other hand, to the extent that globalization appears to reduce the ability of states to act within their own territories, it means that social movements must direct resources toward international linkages and partnerships that may diminish their autonomy or their effectiveness in their home country. Some would argue, for example, that small NGOs supporting poor communities in developing countries need to work on very specific local issues—that they have neither the time nor the resources to engage in more global concerns.

The difficulty of shaping a common agenda that respects the needs and interests of all participants in transnational movements is also an important issue. In the women's movement, for example, there have been notable difficulties in

developing a shared global perspective on economic change. Tensions result from the fact that the economic interests of women in developing countries can conflict directly with those of women in developed countries. Acknowledging the complicity of women in the North in the suffering of women in the South has been a challenge: the preservation of women's consumption standards and employment in the North, for example, results in environmental damage or loss of women's labor rights in the South. Similarly, during the protests in Seattle, the wide range of civil-society organizations that were represented—trade unions, environmental activists, farmers' associations, women's groups, campaigners for social justice—often had very diverse views and aims. Moreover, the NGOs present came predominantly from the North, while civil society from the South was underrepresented.

More inclusive methods of mobilization are needed to ensure greater participation by developing countries—an outcome that might result in a different way of tackling social and environmental conditions. The use of a common label ("civil society") should not obscure the heterogeneity of interests and objectives across groups and countries, and the need to deal in a democratic way with those differences.

Globalization can provide the poor with opportunities for mobilization, for strengthening democratic institutions, and for making their voices heard. But it does not come without risks, perhaps the greatest of which is the potential for marginalizing the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society. The outcome will depend, to a great extent, on developments in civil society and the ways that can be found to promote greater accountability and global responsiveness to the needs of the poor in developing countries. ■

For further reading see L.J. Camp and B. Anderson, "Grameen Phone: Empowering the Poor through Connectivity," *IMP: The Magazine on Information Impacts* (December 1999) (<http://www.cisp.org/imp>); J. Dreze and A. Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford University Press, 1991); F. Fukuyama, "Social Capital and Civil Society" (<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/1999/reforms/fukuyama.htm> [1999]); A. Goetz, "Lobbying for Economic Justice: Women's Movements and the World Bank" (Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK, 1999); P. Heller, "Social Capital as a Product of Class Mobilization and State Intervention: Industrial Workers in Kerala, India," *World Development* 24 (1996); M. Kaldor, "'Civilizing' Globalization? The Implications of the 'Battle in Seattle'" (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global> [2000]); and Self Employed Women's Association website (<http://www.sewa.org>).

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market, which makes it easier for Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan to sell petroleum, minerals, or gum Arabic to finance weapon purchases and intensify civil wars. The toll in the Congo alone includes three million deaths in three years, 6.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, and over a million displaced people. In 1995–99, legal arms suppliers sold Africa \$2.5 billion worth of weapons, with the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – providing 60 percent. In Colombia, Myanmar, and Afghanistan, narcotics production for the world market, armed violence, and food insecurity are tightly linked.

Information and communication technologies work in both Mexico's Zapatista Liberation Front garnered worldwide attention and aid for the plight of the country's indigenous people via the Internet, while Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front coordinates military operations, diamond sales, and arms purchases via satellite phone from bases in the country's hinterland.

NO CONSENSUS AMONG ANALYSTS

Consensus continues to elude scholars and policy analysts as to whether economic ties foster peace. One school of thought asserts that as a web of economic relationships entangles nations, the costs of going to war become prohibitive. Some empirical studies support this proposition. Also, there are well-known cases where weak economic ties prevail between countries experiencing hostilities. India and Pakistan, for example, share one of the world's tensest borders but engage in very little trade with one another.

Other analysts insist that the peace-through-trade notion must be seriously qualified. They argue that trade reduces conflict incentives only when partners enjoy relatively symmetric economic and military relations. For example, although Taiwan and China have extensive trade links, and Taiwan has invested tens of billions of dollars in China, the threat of cross-Straits violence remains considerable. The economic relationship is unmistakably dominated by Taiwan, whereas China is pressing to establish military superiority.

Research to date has focused on globalization's effects in mitigating interstate conflict. Few studies examine the relationship between globalization and civil war, which is much more salient for today's policymakers. One well-known study, funded by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, found a strong relationship between openness to the global economy and reduced risk of civil war. This report concluded that trade promotion policies could help prevent conflicts.

Other research qualifies this conclusion, pointing out that trade's effects in reducing the likelihood of civil war depend on internal distribution, as well as the nature of the relationship between trade and investment partner nations. High levels of inequality associated with conflict. And trade may exacerbate existing inequality depending on how it is carried out. A World Bank study found that low per capita income, negative economic growth, and high dependence on primary commodity exports are a recipe for civil war.

Analyses of the causes of the 1994 Rwandan genocide provide evidence on this point. The country relied heavily on

coffee exports for hard currency and government revenues. The collapse of world prices in the early 1990s led to high unemployment, reduced farm incomes, reduced social spending, and a citizenry receptive to government incitement of ethnic and political violence.

RECONNOITERING PEACE AND FOOD SECURITY

Violence in developing countries stems from a constellation of factors. Ethnic rivalries and environmental scarcities are among them, as are structural factors in which globalization may be implicated. Groups may compete, for example, over resources such as development aid and commodities in demand on world markets. Often pressed into service by national leaders seeking control over natural and human resources, individual combatants still fight to maintain human dignity and a decent standard of living. Policies aimed at reducing conflict should encourage cooperation among rival groups and reduce real and perceived scarcities. The ways aid is delivered in conflict-prone areas are also crucial. Development assistance, including agricultural investment, can deter conflict where it is integrated in the construction of social contexts that promote equity.

Global investors, whether private or public (aid donors), need to emphasize conflict prevention as part of the development agenda if they are to expect positive returns. Developing countries need peace to achieve more food-secure outlooks and to reap potential benefits of globalization.

A number of recent developments may advance globalization's peaceful potential:

- debt relief, which will free resources for investment in human security,
- efforts through the U.N. system to improve data collection on food insecurity among vulnerable groups, in order to facilitate improved international response to famine and chronic undernutrition, and
- emergence of broad civil society coalitions that seek, inter alia, to refocus globalization in ways that promote peace and equity.

Further, donors must allocate humanitarian aid where it is needed most, which may mean more aid to Africa and less to the former Yugoslavia. Global trade and investment agreements must take into account their potential to fuel conflict. Improved codes of conduct and control regimes governing trade in conventional weapons are essential, as are equitable international frameworks to reduce the flows of diamonds, drugs, and fossil fuels that generate resources for war.

More research is needed to bolster policies that foster peace. In particular, work should focus on the relationship between food insecurity and conflict and on the circumstances under which globalization contributes to peace.

Future connections among globalization, food insecurity, and conflict are likely to play out at multiple social and political. Foresight and planning, based in part on hindsight and lessons from history, can help to make the world more peaceful and secure. Careful monitoring is needed of the likely and actual local food security impacts of international trade and aid, both within and beyond the food economy. ■

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