

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

Globalisation and women's health

Being a paper presented at the seminar organised by Girls Power Initiative (GPI) to mark the year 2000 International Women's Day at the Paradise City Hotel, Calabar, on Saturday March 11, 2000

I will start this presentation with a definition of some of the terms in the title of this paper which coincides with the theme we have chosen for this event.

Poverty: This refers to the condition of being without the necessary resources (money, land, property and modern possession etc.) To sustain a minimally acceptable standard of living. This is sometimes measured by the ability of a single woman to provide her family with a decent supply of food, clothing, health care and education. Thus poverty describes a state of existing with possessions too little to sustain a good quality and healthy life. It is a state of being in an inferior state of existence and having very little income to buy basic needs or basic necessities of life. It describes a situation where a citizen receives little or no benefit from the state, a situation where levies and taxes continue to increase while income remains low; a situation where basic education and healthcare are not affordable by majority. A situation of powerlessness, low status and disrespect when compared with others of the same age, race, sex or ethnicity. In short a poor person is a dehumanized person.

Poverty is often accompanied by unemployment, malnutrition, limited access to services, illiteracy, poor health, low status and exposure to environmental hazards. Majority of poor people are girls and women who themselves are people's possessions, property and thus are not expected to own much property.

Globalisation: Simply put, this refers to the movement of economic activities (like production, manufacturing distribution as well as trade and investment) across national boundaries. Globalization is the movement of goods, ideas, information, services, cultural and economic activities across the political boundaries of countries/states. It also refers to growing openness of national

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economies to economic activities by companies from other countries/states. This aspect is referred to as trade liberalization. It results in greater interdependence between different national economies. It results in so-called harmonization of what is produced, exported and imported within a nation as demanded and prescribed by the international economy, hence the phrase "integration into the global economy" or "Global village". State funds are then appropriated and public enterprises are stolen in the name of privatization by those in power to present companies or act as agents of multinational corporations in the promise of higher profits and in response to competition in the so-called global market.

Health: Is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health therefore requires good basic/balanced nutrition, protection from violence and reduction of occupational and environmental hazards throughout one's life-span.

Let us ponder a little over these definitions and ask ourselves where women fit and why?

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. It is considered to date back over to the 15th century during the colonial periods. It represents the growth and expansion of capitalism into new territories. There has been attempts to globalise economies across the world but this has been uneven. Such attempts sometimes get retracted in the interest of national development. Thus globalisation has happened unevenly in cycles for over four centuries. It is the result of policy decisions by developed economies in relation to the needs of international economic institutions that serve such economies at the expense of developing countries.

The content of globalisation therefore include the fact that:

More and more decisions taken by government, companies, and even labour unions are influenced by events happening elsewhere in the world;

* That the way products are made, distributed and used, is organised not by the local policies but on global level;

* That more and more individuals, companies, government and social, political and cultural groups are cultivating economic, political and social relationship at international level.

* That states are developing more cooperative relationships with their neighbours (or "economic blocs") in order to strengthen their economic position within the world economy e.g ECOWAS.

Those who support and stand to benefit from globalization include:

- Government of industrialized countries because their economies are strong, their currency is strong and international acceptable and exchangeable and therefore they can withstand global competition.

- Multinational corporations MNCs
- World trade organisations
- International financial institutions (IFIs)

Polices that promote globalisation

Success of globalization is premised on;

- Privatisation
- Deregulation
- Trade and financial liberation.

Privatisation

This involves the sale of public assets such as companies and land to the private sector. It involves the withdrawal of the state from certain social welfare and economic activities such as health, power, communication etc in favour of the private sector. Privatization also involves the state subcontracting some of its services that is performed to meet the needs of citizens, to private companies.

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Deregulation.

This refers to the abolition of reform of measures that dictate how companies and markets can operate. Thus governments are pressured into:

a) removing subsidies on services and goods which the government used to provide at little or no cost;

b) removing price controls such as those on staple foods and therefore allowing private companies to set their own prices which are usually higher for them to make profit;

c) removing regulations and rules that impose control on private companies on such areas as minimum wage, working conditions, hiring and firing workers i.e. establishing free labour markets in the interest of private sector;

d) Reducing taxes on income and profits in order to free money that companies can invest in the production of goods and services.

Thus through deregulation, governments become weaker and less able to meet the socio-economic needs of its citizens while private sectors becomes stronger and the working people majority of whom are women become poorer and less able to afford the high costs of basic needs.

Trade and financial liberalization

Trade liberalization involves the reduction of import tariffs and the abolition of quotas on imports. Import tariffs are taxes imposed on goods that are imported into a country. This tariffs usually therefore increase the prices of imported goods in order to make them more expensive than those produced within the country (domestically produced goods). This is the most effective way for a government to assist in the development of domestic industries and hence in the growth of national economy.

The situation in Nigeria is that transportation is controlled by the private sector who determine the cost. With constant fuel shortages, transport costs continue to skyrocket and so does prices of goods produced in the country. This is happening

when tariffs are reduced or abolished on imported goods. Hence imported goods become cheaper by default and domestic industries are threatened and poverty deepens. Thus international companies stand to benefit through this policy in the "open" or "free" market and the prices of their goods are usually above the level of income of most citizens. Trading across political boundaries therefore benefit the MNCs. Financial liberalization is then the measure introduced to make it easy for export of money from the markets across national boundaries so that investors are free to move their profits when they want and to where they want.

SAPS and Globalisation

About the early 1980s (1986 in Nigeria) the IFIs (Bretton Woods Institutions) for increasing the pace of globalisation and liberalization in the developing countries purportedly to increase economic growth. The mechanisms devised to do this was structural adjustment policies - SAPS, a set of policies designed by the IMF and World Bank. Governments in the development countries, get lured by the promise of access to loans to help them meet their development goals and to service their debts. Rather than these so-called expectations of development and growth, we are all living witnesses to the hardships caused by SAPS. Our national currency has gone from exchange of N1 to \$4 to where we are now of more than N100 to USA \$1. Our national currency has thus suffered destabilization as a result of SAPs as well as destruction of our economy through inflation and dumping of all kinds of toxic goods and wastes. There has been increased environmental degradation and reduction in quality of life for many, among whom the majority are women and girls. These SAPs are applied in all the developing countries, so for us in Nigeria and our neighbours in the other developing countries, what we have is "Globalization of Poverty". We now have more and more insecure livelihoods with women bearing the heavier burden of meeting the basic nutritional needs of their families.

To sustain this state of degradation and poverty in the third world in order to ensure higher profits for the development economies

of United states and Europe, they constituted WTO in 1995. This is the so-called World Trade organization which the industrialized countries use to force the third world countries to continue the implementation of SAPs. The major components in the SAPs include.

- Currency devaluation
- Cutting back state expenditure on social services e.g health, education transportation et.

- Poverty Alleviation
- Debt Servicing
- Recruitment of Foreign experts even where nationals are better qualified

Currency Devaluation

The loaf of bread that now sells for N70 and above, used to cost N5 in the early 1980s or even 3 for N10.00. Now most people cannot afford to buy bread. A carton of peak milk containing 144 tins used to cost N18.00. now one tin of milk is N45.00 Thus one effect of currency devaluation is decrease of the buying power of most citizens. Yet this destruction of the country's currency is one of the key erorms required by the International Financial institutions IFIs (Bretton Woods Institutions) IMF and World Bank. When the value of the naira is less as it is now, the immediate impact is that basic needs like medicines, food and books i.e. healthcare education and general well-being of people become too expensive for majority of citizens. Yet, we have the slogan of Poverty Alleviation. Almost every women has suffered the impact of price hikes.

Cutting Back State Expenditure

IFIs require currency devaluation which brings about inflation. At the same time, they require governments to carry out programmes to counter inflation. The aim of "anti - inflation programmes is reduce the demand for a range of goods and services and this is done by reducing the number of public employees through retrenchments and reducing or removing government investments in social sectors like health, education, food subsidies, transportation etc. Thus cynically, by retrenchment. And low wages poor citizens most of whom are

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women can no longer afford or have access to such goods and services that were previously subsidized and so and so their demand for such become reduced. If trade unions protest, they are outlawed or arrested and detained to satisfy the IFs.

Furthermore, another demand by IFs for government to reduce the amount of money it spends. So government raises funds through taxation of its citizens among others and is not allowed to spend to build roads, schools, hospitals, provide potable water etc. In order to continue to obtain loans from the IFs, our governments obey these demands even as it is at the expense of the health, education and general well-being of its citizens.

Conclusion: In Nigeria as in most of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, women are those that take care of home, providing water; buying, cooking and serving food and taking care of sick family members. Thus globalisation and poverty, further exploit women's labour when government cuts back on water supply healthcare and education.

As can be seen, SAPs shift cost of human reproduction from public or government responsibility to the private sphere, the home where women become the targets of exploitation. So women are expected to shoulder the responsibility of the rising cost of food, healthcare and education costs as well as stretching their energy to make ends meet with less and less resources. It is clear therefore that poverty and globalisation has greater devastating impact on girls and women in Nigeria than on men; hence the popular slogan "Feminization of Poverty".

For most women, globalization has meant increased marginalisation, less access to productive resources like land, employment, water, equipments and infrastructure and also less access to reproductive resources such as available and affordable good quality healthcare, food and medicine. Thus globalization for majority of Nigerian women means poverty.

Finally, what can be said to be true is that globalization is NOT Fixed; It is NOT a given and it is NOT IMMUTABLE; It is NOT inevitable; It is NOT a new phenomenon. It is NOT Driven by abstract

market forces.

Rather: Globalization is:

- Driven by profit for MNCs, USA and European economies and their allies in the Nigerian ruling class.

- Driven by corporate/business strategies

- Promoted by manipulations, political interventions to install who agrees to play ball at the expense of the lives of citizens and promoted by negotiations that are gender-blind to the plights of women and the poor.

- Imbalanced in its impact in terms of who gains and who loses. Women lose most, the ruling class and their commission agents gain through privatisation.

- Uneven in geographical spread. It benefits the industrialised countries and the third world loses.

- it develops and sustain polarization of the haves and have-nots between countries and within countries; between male and female; between employer and employees.

- it is unsustainable and unstable. Its demise can be accelerated by the losers who form the majority of women and poor men. ♀