Globalisation, vulnerability, poverty and human limits

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Abstract
Globalisation has led to the increase in vulnerability and poverty of human populations. Vulnerability and poverty present limits to the globalisation process. By addressing vulnerability and poverty at the very local level we could help to form new links between people and promote the formation of more sustainable and resilient communities.

Key words: globalisation, vulnerability, human development, poverty

1. Introduction

There are almost as many definitions of globalisation as there are authors involved in the subject. Globalisation, according to Ulrich Beck (Beck 2007) is a process, in which the national states lose their sovereignty because of their membership in international and supra-national organizations, their orientations, identities and networks. Globalisation is an irreversible process presented by the huge international market, the information revolution, and the universal advocacy of human rights, global cultural industry, and polycentric international politics with the impact on the everyday life of people.

Global pollution, trans-cultural conflicts, natural disasters – anything that happens anywhere on the globe is not fixed to a particular place – it influences the life of people all over the world. Globalisation is the clash of local cultures. Robertson (1992) speaks about glocalisation. McCorquadele and Fairbrother (Pinstrup-Andersen and Sandoe 2007) define globalisation as "an economic, political, social and ideological phenomenon, which carries with it unanticipated, often contradictory and polarizing consequences." In the same article Falk distinguishes "globalisation-from–above" as the collaboration between leading states and the main agencies of capital formation and "globalisation-from-below" as popular participation at local levels, the building of civil societies and the enhancement of international non-governmental organizations. There are many faces of globalisation: economic, social, cultural, politic, ecological, etc. The only thing which really joins all definitions and faces of globalisation is the overall interdependence and the occurrence of unexpected impacts, especially the negative impacts which illustrate the possible limits in this global process.

Limits, themselves, always include hidden messages or challenges and hide the temptation to overcome them. It is clear that there are limits to globalisation. But these limits are warnings rather than challenges. In 2003 James C. Bennet asked whether globalisation has any limits and the answer was – yes, there are many: at least public health, security issues, airline industry and fear of terrorism. "The more globalisation, the less democracy." The decision process in the international organizations is not democratic; which really represents more than a serious limit (Dahrendorf 2007).

It is true that globalisation on one side enables the contact between people from different parts of the world, but on the other side, it builds barriers between people. Globalisation led to a new emphasis on the local, but the emphasis is not positive. It is the local level that individuals suffer from hunger – one of the worst globalisation impacts.

Globalisation connects and also splits. It could form trans-cultural neighborhoods, while it can break local ones. Global and local mean two sides of one coin while one side does not see the other. Globalisation means a new distribution of wellness - global richness and local poverty. Globalisation causes rich to become even richer and the poor to become even more poor. (Zygmunt Bauman in Beck 1997).

Poverty is the unfortunate effect which is very often connected with vulnerability, another phenomenon which cannot be omitted when speaking about the unfortunate effects of globalisation. "Recent research indicates that greater numbers of people are more vulnerable to natural hazards than ever before, due, in part, to increases in population, but, more so, to their location in dangerous areas". (Quarantelli in Hilhorst and Bankoff 2004, 21), which only confirms the abovementioned. Globalisation is a very complex process, due to the interdependency of all actors, activities and impacts; it is very difficult but still important to separate, measure and explore. Liberalization coming hand in hand with the process of globalisation disturbs old tribal, cultural, and religious structures, and the world loses its pillars (Dahrendorf 2007).

2. Two limits to explore

This paper would like to explore two impacts or limits of globalisation: vulnerability and poverty. I would like to show that by addressing vulnerability and poverty at the very local level we could help to form new links between people and promote the formation of more sustainable and resilient communities. I would also like to compare different approaches on how to handle these severe impacts of globalisation in order to highlight that the local level models of social work are often more effective from the long term perspective.

2.1. Globalisation and vulnerability

Vulnerability is a more accurate concept than poverty in understanding the processes and impacts of "underdevelopment". It is also more forward-looking concept and hence more appropriate for policy-making than poverty (Bankoff, Frerks, Hilhorst 2004).

What enhances the vulnerability of different communities? What does vulnerability mean? What makes people vulnerable? The answer is, on the one side, poverty, resource depletion and marginalization, and on the other diversity of risks, generated by the interplay between local and global processes. Social inequality causes an unequal exposure to risk by making some people more prone to disaster than others. For billions of people the nature of their vulnerability is changing and intensifying, while their ability to cope has diminished (Bankoff, Frerks, Hillhorst 2004).

These coping strategies are very often damaged by large-scale projects such as big dams, land conversion, hydropower dams (very often called as development aggression). In a fast changing environment, local people find that traditional coping strategies are no longer effective. The level of vulnerability is in very close dependency with the capacities of the society to absorb shock and to recover. The higher the capacities, the lower is the vulnerability of the society.

There are many triggers involved in globalisation, which could start the process of increasing vulnerability of different communities and specific inhabited spaces. Over 95 per cent (Bankoff, Frerks, Hillhorst 2004) of all deaths from natural hazards occur in developing nations where a billion people or so now live in the world's rapidly expanding shanty towns. This population is disproportionately more at risk from natural hazard and has increasingly been identified. People lose their natural coping mechanisms, leaving homes where they were once able to protect themselves. When coming into cities, they very often start to live in slums in very tight proximity with other people, with completely new habits and new way of livelihood. Taking all these statements into account we could say that globalisation destroys

communities and societies and produces new sorts of vulnerability and poverty. The number of people affected by natural disaster is doubling within10 years rising from 78 million in 1992 to 170 million in 2001. All indication suggest that the magnitude and frequency of natural hazards have increased in recent decades and are likely to intensify in the foreseeable future (Bankoff, Frerks, Hillhorst 2004).

2.2. Globalisation and poverty

Poverty has been termed as the most significant problem confronting the modern world. We all know the figures reflecting the gravity and scale of poverty in the world as the most serious moral issue of our time: 1, 1 billion people or 28% of the global population are absolutely poor, living on less than 1 USD a day (Pinstrup-Andersen and Sandoe 2007, 131). Poverty is a very complex concept to define; there could be major forms identified: income poverty, human or quality of life poverty, basic needs poverty and capability poverty (Cox, Pawar 2006).

It would not be fair and even true to insist that poverty is growing and that globalisation is to blame (regardless of the fact that it would be difficult to measure it). On the contrary, there has been some reduction in the proportion of the global population, living on less than USD 1 a day from 28% in 1990 to 21% in 2001, in absolute terms the number declined from 1.22 billion only to 1.09 billion (Pinstrup-Andersen and Sandoe 2007, 131).

Ann Harrison (Harrison 2006) shows in her article that the poor could benefit from globalisation if all policies and institutions were in place. In addition, there does not exist a direct evidence to show a relationship between globalisation and poverty. In fact globalisation means first of all economic integration of states and economic integration always helps the economy of the state. According to Harrison there are many countries or many local communities left out. The reasons could be their own inability, their own unwillingness, or cultural and religious obstacles. Harrison confirms that globalisation produces winners as well as losers. Inequality between states has decreased while inside states it has increased (Pinstrup-Andersen and Sandoe 2007, 131).

The aforementioned suggests that there are strong links between globalisation and inequality. Inequality increases (somehow hidden) without the change of poverty rate. It means that the poor are even more poor, poverty is more individualized. "Poverty can decline while inequality increases" (Majid 2003) "especially in the situations of exclusion, the possible adverse effects on growth and inequality may be such that they adversely impact and dominate efforts to reduce poverty." We could say that inequality is a very important phenomenon, representing something as an inter–component between globalisation and poverty. Distribution of poverty started to be very important. In this case, all statistical numbers seem to be only trash. The UNDP report from 2003 confirms that globalisation benefits less the poor people within countries: the impact of globalisation on internal poverty relates to both developing and industrial countries. We could say that the more poverty is "hidden", the more severely it affects individuals and communities.

3.Sense of responsibility

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a global partnership that has grown from the commitments and targets established at the world summits of the 1990s. They incorporate all necessary steps which have to be done so that the majority of mankind lives in dignity after 2015. It includes the well known targets regarding reducing poverty, illiteracy, gender inequity, various mortal diseases etc.

"Looking ahead to 2015 and beyond, there is no question that we can achieve the overarching goal: we can put an end to poverty. In almost all instances, experience has demonstrated the

validity of earlier agreements on the way forward; in other words, we know what to do. But it requires an unswerving, collective, long-term effort."
(United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon 2008)

This is really the highest expression of responsibility which is supported by governments of all UN nations, especially by those of the "rich" part of the world.

States, international institutions, international community

Many people that are coping to survive in war, disasters, or long term starving not only have each other to lean on, but find additional relief in the protection, food and basic care provided by international aid. The world of international aid is very complicated. The actors are first of all people stricken by war, disasters, people who are starving and suffering from diseases, but also helping individuals and organizations in the field, in direct contact with the victims. Beyond this there are organizations who organize the aid as for instance international non-governmental organization, United Nations, different agencies, which work for states who finance the international development cooperation, DG8, World Bank, World Summits, tax payers, philanthropist and last, but not least, individual donors.

Humanitarian assistance

Every society has safety nets for its own needy, while the western society expresses its interest to help yet others by the message of humanitarism: "to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found." The desire to assist people in need is old. It has its roots in Christianity 2000 years ago. The history of modern humanitarian aid lasts 150 years. We can say that only globalisation made possible that humanitarian relief had been realized in the way we could see it now. Aid is an integrated part of everyday realities of crises and post crises situations. Humanitarian relief is called very often emergency relief. The reason for changing the terminology for emergency is that there is the experience that the aid has to cover the basic needs of people and has to be very fast and effective in order to help the people to recover and adopt to a new livelihood.

Reconstruction

Once the emergency is over, more aid comes in order to rebuild the society. This phase or kind of aid has to help the people to build new houses and establish some livelihood. This part of aid is very sensitive one. It is very difficult to recognize, when the people want to start their "new lives". It differs very much, and is very much dependent on the kind of suffering the people went through. This kind of aid is directed at building capacities and prevention works in order to diminish vulnerability. Sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish it from development (but even from the emergency phase – especially after the war conflicts).

Development aid and cooperation

In the development cooperation, there are "big players" engaged. Development aid is realized by big organizations, in long-term perspectives, almost often by money from the governments or international or trans-national organizations. The amount of money invested into development aid is enormous. Until 2005 2.3 trillion USD had been invested (Easterly 2006, 165). There are at least 5 main reasons why development aid is realized: ethics (corresponding to responsibility), security, economics, environment and politics. The instruments on how to realize development vary from political decisions on the highest global level (as decisions of G8) and cooperation with states to the work of small organizations doing social work and supporting cooperation on the level of local communities.

International Social Work

Development on the local level can be seen as international social work (Cox, Pawar 2006). The above mentioned evidence confirms that relying on trade or foreign investment alone is not enough. International social work (ISW) is a long term effort of different development organizations who work at the grass roots level, in synergy with local communities enhancing and supporting their local capacities and decreasing their vulnerabilities. The work of ISW is not limited only by the cooperation with local communities; but also with specific population as migrants and minorities. One of the most important roles that ISW plays is in the reconciliation and peace-building process. The main role of ISW is working with vulnerable, excluded groups and communities with the main task: reduce the poverty and enhance human dignity.

The international social work approach understands its work from 4 main perspectives: global, ecological, social development and human rights. The instruments the ISW uses are community work, empowerment of communities, different sorts of participatory approaches, and community support: basic literacy courses, primary school education, basic health care, adult education, basic training, and people's capacity building, awareness-raising and empowerment, local income-generation programs, credit schemes and people's banks, community-based welfare programs, self-help groups and promotion of self-reliance, collective responses to specific situations, leadership development, local organization and institution promotion and capacity building, linking local organizations to government agencies and international structures, comprehensive community development programs (Cox, Pawar 2006, 143).

4. Approaches and values

Once the disaster happens in a vulnerable country, a very fast response is needed. According to local conditions which depend on intensity of the disaster, the coping capacity of concerned population and the activity of the government in charge, international relief is offered. It is true that emergency or humanitarian relief has saved many lives and reduced human suffering during the emergency situation while delivering water, sanitation, shelter, health care and food. Nevertheless – in order to be as fast as possible – there are mistakes done – many of them are evitable. The time pressure is very often also caused by impatient donors (regardless of whom they are) who want to see results. That is why local population is omitted, the aid is offered regardless of local capacities and coping mechanisms. The other problem is to recognize the end of emergencies, because agencies are part of the field actors that together constitute the reality in the emergency and post – emergency situation. Assistance in reconstruction and humanitarian aid are both criticized for their inability to adjust to local realities of emergency and post emergency. This differs very much if reconstruction is done after a war or a simple disaster. Most crises are combined crises with wars or ethnic conflicts; the emergency situation with violence continues together with the reconstruction (Bankoff, Frerks and Hillhorst 2004). Another problem of this kind resulting from the long term delivery of basic goods could be creating dependencies and supporting the exchange of food for guns, not to mention the creation of other inequalities as well as envy among people. In addition to this, the speed of action sometimes makes transparent accounting impossible (Princová 2008).

Although the distinction between relief and reconstruction is sometimes hard to recognize, it is necessary to start with the reconstruction phase as soon as possible. This phase, as seen above has very much to do with prevention programs and building local capacities. We speak about developmental relief, where the principle of participation is strongly required. The complementary LRRD approach is applied as much as possible

because it brings into life the continuous help to the population through prevention programs in order to lower the vulnerability and increase the capacity of the population.

Another approach is the human rights approach implemented by human rights organizations, which expanded their mandate for promoting economical, social and cultural rights. Focusing only on civil and political rights does not cover the most serious areas of human suffering. These organizations advocate for instance justice in organizing collective resources in the society (Bell, Coicaud 2008).

Easterly (2006) divides the world of international aid into the world of "planners" and the world of "seekers". In the context of this lecture we could say that "big players" are "planners" and the developmental relief and international social work people are "seekers".

5. Conclusion

There is not a direct link between globalisation and poverty. It is more appropriate to speak about links between poverty and inequality. Is inequality our limit? If we want to reduce inequality, does it mean that the equality is a goal? Is it the means or the goal? Equality is not embedded in all religions or accepted by all cultures. It is a multidimensional concept, not possible to be a universal principle, because we were born in different societies, and we grow up in different cultures. In addition, a minimal degree of individualism and universalism in the society is important. Erik Thorbecke (in Pinstrup-Andersen and Sandoe 2007) expresses the hypothesis that the communities and societies with cooperative behaviors lived better than those who did not accept this principle. He concludes that cooperative behaviors seem to be more natural. The cooperative behaviors are required and appreciated by all actors – local people as well as the helpers, who eventually come:

"There are great reservoirs of affection, resourcefulness and compassion among the poor, which make lives tolerable, when they might otherwise be unbearable… it is impossible to overestimate the spontaneous generosity and the accummulated wisdom of people who have, amazingly not been embittered by the troubles and losses they have sustained"(Seabrook 2007, 66).

Cooperative behaviors could help to diminish the extremes in poverty and in exclusion. The skills and methods of international social work could help to overcome limits of "big plans" of "big planers" – politicians, and international institutions, which do decrease poverty but they cannot see the hidden effects of growing extreme poverty and exclusion because they are for them invisible. "Development must be about people and therefore focus on building people capacities" (Amartya Sen in Pinstrup-Andersen and Sandoe 2007).

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