

The Effects of Globalization on Young People

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This paper seeks to highlight the key policy recommendation arising out of young people, who are highly affected, but rarely considered. Accordingly, its perspective is necessarily broader than the detailed policy recommendations within the six cross-cutting themes which are privatization; global structure and financial architecture; representation, activism and human rights; inequitable relationships; education; and displacement. Clearly, these six issues are interrelated and overlap in many ways, as do the related human rights and solutions offered. Only by undertaking a holistic approach to the challenges of globalization that effective solutions can be found.

It has become a cliché to say that “globalization” is one of the defining characteristics of our time. Every generation feels that it is living in a time of great change and today is no exception.

Despite the fact that most academics, media commentators, economists and politicians, agree that the process of globalization exists, it remains a highly contested concept. Many celebrate the continued interconnectedness of national economies towards a single international economy, the increases in cultural homogeneity and the advances in communication technology that occur almost daily. However, others raise concerns about the direction of globalization, its impacts on the most vulnerable and the loss of local community. This level of concern raised by both high profile commentators like, international banker, George Soros and Joseph Stiglitz, the former chief economist of the World Bank, as well as the thousands of young people from every continent who have responded to the International Youth Parliament’s Youth Commission into Globalization.

We can define globalization broadly; that is, it is the many economic, political, technological and social processes, innovations and changes that are increasing the interconnectedness of our world. It can be thought of as the butterfly which flaps its wings in one part of the world only for the flow on to affect the weather patterns elsewhere. Likewise, we live in a time when a decision in New York (or London, Paris, Sydney, Jakarta) can affect the livelihoods of subsistence farmers in the Solomon Islands, or the viability of a small rural centre in Australia. This level of interconnectedness means that those who are making the decisions are further away from those who feel the consequences of them.

While there are many who debate the effects of globalization, few discuss one of the most *highly affected but rarely considered* segments of the international community – young people. Young people are at the sharp end of globalization. They can be amongst affected, but are also potentially the most adaptable to change. Young people are not the only vulnerable to the vast changes brought on by the processes of globalization, but can also be the key change agents. Despite this, young people are often ignored both in the literature and the sphere of political decision – making. In this way, young people must be considered key agents of change for globalization, as well as its potential victims.

Last four years were the culmination of a period work by the Youth Commission on Globalization, an International Youth Parliament (IYP) initiative. The conclusions of them are different in a number of ways. *Firstly, young people are part of an international network* that has been developed over a number of years. So, these young people have not only undertaken research into the identified issues as part of IYP Youth Commission. *Second reason, young people as “agents of change”*. There are action items and policy recommendations of governments, multilateral institutions, non – government organizations (NGOs), corporations and individuals. There is a sophisticated analysis of the key – themes identified and a multi-level response presented which is within a rights – based framework. In essence, the position of us, as humans, have a number of inalienable rights. Ultimately, the processes of globalization must be managed from its perspective. The rights – based framework provides a lens with which to consider the processes of globalization.

The *third addition*, the process of globalization means *“new voices of the young people”*. While the expertise offered by many academics, world leaders and media commentation is valuable, there are few opportunities for the voices of young people to be heard.

What globalization means to the young people and what is the impact of it has had on their lives? International Labour Office, University of Washington and UNICEF identified 11 key issues as relevant areas where globalization is most significantly affecting young people. These *key issues* are:

1. Access to and privatization of education
2. HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care for youth
3. Export oriented manufacturing industries and young workers
4. Trafficking of young women
5. Indigenous youth
6. Vulnerability of agricultural youth
7. Violence and young people’s security

8. Globalization of youth activism and human rights
9. Young people access to technology
10. Young people access to water
11. Global youth culture and youth identity

While each of these issues focus on a particular one, the integrated nature of the themes will present will become clear. It is not possible to discuss any one of these issues without in some way also considering the others. It raises questions about farming practices, consumption patterns, food security, government trade and economic policy, international trade agreements and demands on agricultural lands. As a result, a number of **overarching themes** have emerged for young people.

- ***Access to and privatization of education***

Internationally, more than 10,000 state – owned companies were privatized in the ten years between 1998 and 1998. (Nash, 1999). The arguments for privatization include efficiency improvements and the removal of “unnatural” government monopolies that restrain trade (Barker and Mander, 2001). However, for low – income nations, and often the more wealthy nations too, the results are very different. The experience has led to declining employment, increasing corruption and environmental degradation.

For young people, privatization policies affect all aspects of their lives. From access to education, to employment opportunities, the decision by governments (with the advice of multilateral institutions) to private means that choices once existed may well disappear.

- ***Global structure and financial architecture***

While multilateral institutions were once considered remote and intangible, there is no denying that young people are more aware than ever that this institutions play an increasingly important role in their lives. Each of the 11 issues have identified the role and impact of the various multilateral institutions. It is noted that it is within these very institutions that there is hope for a version of globalization that is more positive, not only for young people, but for all. There remain a great need for reform however.

For example, The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have often been blamed for bad advice that has lead to negative economic, social and environmental consequences. Despite this, it is within these institutions, along with a more active United Nations, that we see the potential to promote greater democracy, environmental sustainability and human rights.

- ***Representation, activism and human rights***

This theme is the issue of representation and the need to provide a platform for the voices of young people. It is clear that most of young people have very few opportunities to be heard, and this is a source of ongoing frustration for them. For those formal institutions that do offer a voice, it is often within stringent boundaries that offer little flexibility.

For the North, the result is the continues fall in voter turn out apathy towards formal politics. For both the North and South, such trends should be of growing concern as young people may well decide that the solutions to today's local, national, regional and global problems are not available through formal structures.

Young people believe that they have much to offer in overcoming the challenges evident in the world today. However, the formal structures of decision – making act to frustrate rather than promote youth participation.

- ***Inequitable relationships***

The growing interrelationship between economies has often cemented an uneven interconnectedness which allows agencies in one region to exercise power through decisions, actions, or inaction that can have significant consequences for nations, communities and households of other regions (Held, D., 1999). According to Goodman (Goodman, 2000), such power differentials are fundamental attribute of economic globalization.

Young people at the sharp end of globalization have found that while opportunities may well increase, more often, however, inequitable relationship institutionalize poverty by concentrating resources and wealth amongst economically dominant nations, corporations and sections of the community. The past decade has proven that the convergence predicted from global markets has only resulted in an “increasing concentration of income... and wealth among people, corporations and countries” of the North (UNDP, 2001). Young people see this every day.

- ***Education***

Investment in education plays an important role in equitable development and large – scale reduction in poverty. However, 130 million primary school age children in developing countries have no access to basic education (Oxfam, 2005). Exclusion from education deprives young people of the skills necessary to gain employment and undermines the productive capacities of impoverished households. For many, globalization stands as an obstacle to accessing education. Yet education is absolutely essential to one's capacity to participate in the processes of globalization. For many governments, the ability to provide basic education is being greatly diminished by the demands of servicing foreign debts overseen by IMF and World Bank. In many heavily indebted countries, debt – servicing payments account for more than twice the amount devoted to education.

- ***Displacement***

Displacement refers to the forced removal people from their homes. From the environmental consequences of globalization and changes in agricultural patterns that affect agricultural livelihoods, to the threat of conflict over 'resource' wars, the consequences of displacement are felt on many different levels.

While economic prosperity may offer increased opportunities for some, the benefits are not available to all. Focusing on environmental displacement we find that despite the many commitment made by the large number of governments since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and the more recent World Summit on Sustainable Development, including a declared focus on 'sustainable development', little appears to have changed.

The systemic nature of the impacts of globalization means that these environmental challenges cannot be separated from those of poverty, debt and other social issues.

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