
KEYNOTE PAPERS

Globalisation and Third World poverty

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We cannot be justly rich at the cost of others' poverty.

What does globalisation mean?

Globalisation is a complex and somewhat slippery concept, which means different things to different people. Many see it as a primarily economic phenomenon, involving the increasing integration of national economic systems through the growth in international trade, investment and capital flows. One can also point to a rapid increase in cross-border social, cultural and technological exchange as part of globalisation. It also means that through instantaneous communications, knowledge and culture can be shared around the world simultaneously.

Left critics of globalisation might define the word quite differently, presenting it as worldwide drive toward a globalised economic system dominated by supranational corporate trade and banking institutions that are not accountable to democratic processes or national governments. Globalisation certainly is an undeniably capitalist process that has taken off as a concept in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and of socialism as a viable alternate form of economic organi-

sation. One thing is for sure though – it is here to stay and requires new responses from all the sections of the community – including social workers.

On the positive side it offers great potential for human development. One of the major benefits of globalisation has been the incredible growth of the Internet and instant electronic accessibility for many of us. However we should not forget that half of the world still has to make their first telephone call. Globalisation operates within – and some would argue directly causes – a situation of global inequality.

Globalisation has created new vulnerabilities to old threats. Criminal networks take advantage of the most advanced technologies to traffic around the world in drugs, arms, precious metals and stones – even people. International paedophile groups exchange material on a vast scale over the Internet. Terrorist groups take advantage of open borders to wreak havoc on a massive and unprecedented scale – as the horrors of September 11th and the recent horrific attack in Bali demonstrated only too graphically. Diseases have shaped history for millennia, spread by traders, invaders and natural carriers. But the most recent upsurge in the global transmission of pathogens, above all

the AIDS virus, has hit with a velocity and scope made possible only by unprecedented mobility. In the globalisation workshop yesterday some participants mentioned the word 'paralysis' about how they felt when thinking of this globalisation – who wouldn't?

We are far from the comfortable picture of a globalising world with an improving standard of living for all.

Globalisation needs to be inclusive

What is fast developing is a *two-tiered global order* characterized by growing economic polarization and social exclusion. The result of globalisation has been the sharpening of the division of societies into two major groups: a minority with capital and skills who flourish in the global market place, and a majority without, unable to share in the benefits of globalisation. One of the gravest challenges faced by the world community is how to promote a process of globalisation that includes *all* countries and *all* segments of society.

Despite the widely recognized benefits of globalisation, one billion, two hundred million of the world's six billion – a quarter of the world's population – still cannot fulfil their basic needs for food, water, sanitation, health care, housing or education and must try to subsist on less than US\$1 a day and half the world – nearly three billion people – live on less than two dollars a day. In more than 30 of the poorest national economies (most of them in sub-Saharan Africa), real per capita incomes have been declining since the early 1980s. According to the UN one child in seven in Africa dies before their 5th birthday; about 1.1 billion worldwide lack adequate drinking water.

The crisis is most severe in

southern Africa where presently at least 14 million people face starvation in four southern African countries unless the international community acts swiftly. There are several reasons for the current crisis, including drought, floods, failing economic policies and, in Zimbabwe, the disruption of farming due to the government's controversial land reform programme. But far and away the biggest reason for this crisis is the high rate of HIV and AIDS in the region, which has weakened the local population's resistance to disease and left them more susceptible to famine.

In Botswana, among 25 to 29 year old women attending antenatal care in urban areas, 55.6% were living with HIV/AIDS in 2001. In Swaziland the corresponding rate was 33.9% and in Zimbabwe 40.1%. Young women are the most affected due to biological and social factors and what is needed is a complete turn around in men's sexual behaviour that marginalises and leaves women highly vulnerable to HIV infection.

HIV affects entire families and communities – we are talking about millions of people infected with the virus – 3.5 million new infections during 2001, bringing to 28.5 million the total number of people living with the virus in sub-Saharan Africa, with 11 million orphans. Yet only 30,000 people were on antiretroviral drugs at the end of 2001 – a minuscule 0.001% of those infected.

The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation have estimated that southern Africa will have to import almost four million tonnes of food over the next year in order to avert a humanitarian crisis. The WFP has estimated that the cost of such an international aid operation would be around US\$400 million. *Yet this US\$400 million is about what the world spends on arms purchases in 5 hours. What are our global priorities and have we got these right?*

The United Nations has set up a Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to be funded by governments from around the world. The 12 billion dollars required for the Global Fund could be found within slightly more than a day's military expenditure – and that was even before September 11th and the enormous military build-up that is

now occurring. Former President Clinton has urged the United States to increase its spending on anti-HIV programmes by nearly US\$2 billion – which is less than 3% of the requested increase of defence and homeland security budgets. I know it's difficult criticizing military expenditure at times of national trauma and grief for those killed by terrorist atrocities – but there is a far greater terrorism going on at a global level which is more or less ignored by the world's media.

Less than one per cent of what the world spends every year on weapons could put every child in the world into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn't happen. The global economy must have a more solid foundation in shared values and institutional practices – it must advance broader, and more inclusive, social purposes.

How do we tackle poverty?

The world's leading expert on the causes of famine, Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen says that hunger in the world is primarily related to poverty. It is not principally connected with food production at all, but is restrained by lack of income, by not being able to buy food and by uncaring policies of governments in both developing and developed world. People can't afford to buy food when they must also buy medicines to treat opportunistic infections. Quoting from one study in Uganda, researchers found:

You had people dying of hunger, but they had food to sell. That really amazed me. They ate the minimum possible because they needed money to buy the drugs. They needed money to send kids to school. After they looked after school and themselves with the drugs, whatever remained they used for food.

Although poverty is primarily characterised in economic terms, approaches to address it should go beyond eliminating absolute poverty – and with more than a billion people living in absolute poverty we are very far from achieving this goal. We need a broader and more inclusive definition of poverty that takes into account the perspectives of *human rights, empowerment and economic justice*, and issues of wealth distribution, as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow both within and between countries.

Poverty needs a wider definition that extends beyond income levels or GNP. It needs to be concerned with the *assets* on which most poor people rely for their livelihoods, including access to resources (natural and financial), good health, capacity to work, good housing, provision of basic services, and inclusiveness in the social and political system. There is a lack of attention to the social relations that so often underpin poverty – for instance the powerlessness of poor communities and being the object of discrimination.

At a *local level* poverty reduction must ensure that poor farmers, pastoralists, and those who depend on forests and fisheries have access to the natural resource base that permits sustainable livelihoods. Also that the increasing urban poor have the possibility of finding work and sustaining themselves and their families. They also need to be able to influence the political process and have their voice heard by the powers-that-be, rather than the usual crushing of opposition or dissenting voices that so often takes place. Inequitable patterns of ownership or use rights and exclusion from decision-making processes underpin poverty because they limit both people's access to income-earning opportunities, services and resources, and the fulfilment of their civil, political and social rights.

Moving to the *global level*, we must challenge the unjust tariffs of the World Trade Organisation and in particular support the farmers of the poorest countries of the world against the unjust subsidies of the richer nations, protecting their own markets and keeping others outside. Europe, for example, is two-faced about this: demanding market openings from the poor to exploit their economies, but practising protectionism to defend their own special interests. Subsidies mean that the EU gives US\$2 a day to every cow in Europe but leaves more than one billion men, women and children living on half that amount.

Rich countries spend US\$1 billion per day on farm subsidies and this squanders resources in the rich world, leaving less for development assistance – and profoundly damages opportunities for poor countries to invest in their own development. The call by the UN for US\$10 to 12 billion a year to tackle AIDS could

easily be met simply by transferring the subsidies that the industrialised countries provide to their agricultural sectors – this would only take 10 to 12 days at the US\$1 billion that subsidies costs the rich world. This would also have the added benefit of opening up global trade barriers more to the developing world. The target of 0.7% for aid to be provided by the rich countries, although woefully inadequate, must still be achieved.

Debt

Debt is another area where vast sums are funnelled out of developing countries to the rich world. The more than US\$10 billion sub-Saharan African countries pay each year in debt service is three times their expenditure on health. The vast interest payments on loans – which in some cases have financed genuine development projects, but in others were taken to finance prestige projects or supplement military budgets – now mean that there is a net surplus of capital flowing from Africa to the industrialised countries. The World Bank's own Global Finance Development publication that tracks the annual movement of international capital flows to developing countries shows that *total debt continues to rise, despite ever-increasing payments, while aid is falling*. The developing world now spends US\$13 on debt repayment for every US\$1 it receives in grants. Some poor countries are told by the IMF and World Bank to pay around 20 to 25 percent of their export earnings towards debt repayment. Yet, no European country is repaying its loans at levels higher than four percent. Why then do they insist poor African countries pay what they refuse to pay and consider unsustainable?

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) policy has long been criticized by many organizations for not actually amounting to much relief in real terms due to it being tied to certain conditionalities that are recommended by the IMF and World Bank, which prescribed the problems of the poorer countries in the first place.

However through the efforts of international humanitarian organisations, such as the Jubilee 2000 Coalition, Transparency Inter-

national, and local human rights organisations, there are initiatives to 'drop the debt' or 'swapping debt' in exchange for a commitment to development activities, which must be supported and extended further.

The World Summit for Social Development in 1995 recognized this inequity and the predominance of market forces and concluded that in the context of globalisation, economic forces cannot be separated from social ones. Governments committed themselves to assessing the social impact of economic adjustment programmes and to putting poverty eradication at the centre of their strategies. There is need for stronger efforts to realise the recommended commitment to the 20:20 Initiative, which was spelt out at the Copenhagen World Summit in 1995 under which developed and developing country partners would allocate an average 20 percent of ODA and 20 per cent of the national budget respectively, to basic social programmes.

This was similarly endorsed at the recent World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg where perhaps the most useful outcome was that governments agreed to halve the number of people lacking clean drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals

Other goals previously agreed by the world leaders include global targets to tackle inequity – the Millennium Development Goals in September 2000 – are an ambitious agenda for reducing poverty.

The goals include:

- halving extreme poverty and hunger and achieving universal primary education and gender equity in education by 2015
- reducing under-five mortality and maternal mortality by two-thirds and three-quarters respectively
- reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS
- halving the 20% of the world's population without access to safe drinking water
- improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers around the world by 2020, and
- developing a global partnership for development, with targets for

aid, trade and debt relief.

Progress towards the goals has been mixed. Some countries are on track for some goals but none of the goals are likely to be reached at the current rate of global progress. The reasons are many, but they often include insufficient and inefficient public spending, crippling debt burdens, inadequate market access in developed countries, and declining official development assistance.

Abuse of human rights in the developing world

I don't just want to point a finger at the rich world for doing little to seriously tackle the endemic poverty that plagues the poor world. Although it may have become commonplace these days to denounce the West, the IMF, World Bank and expose the negative consequences of globalisation, an unfortunate tendency has been to ignore the very real abuse of human rights, corruption, racism and ethnic cleansing taking place in many parts of the developing world.

We also have to tackle the dictators, the bureaucrats and power-hungry cliques around the world that manipulate and exploit the poor within their own countries for their own selfish purposes. Zimbabwe is a case in point, where although all groupings within the country were willing to work towards land reform, an organized campaign of political violence often sponsored by the youth militia, the police and army under President Mugabe has led directly to the deaths of over 150 people since 2000. This has impoverished a country that used to be the breadbasket of the region, but now has to import nearly two million tons of grain to feed its people this year. This is also a country where the army torture independent journalists, down any independent media, refuse to licence alternative radio or TV stations and have a gross record of human rights abuse.

What principles are important?

What can we do in the face of this inequity, human right abuse and lack of fairness? Firstly let's define the principles that are important. It might help to review a statement made in September this year by

representatives of the Commonwealth civil society to a meeting of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers on how to finance the United Nations Millennium Development goals on reducing global poverty. They stressed their belief that development should be:

- *People-centred and human-rights based* – respecting the economic, social and cultural rights of poor communities and marginalised sectors of society, with specific attention to the rights of women and children
- *Participatory* – involving the active engagement of civil society and promoting shared responsibility with government in decision- and policy-making and implementation.
- *Sustainable* – based on local priorities and resources, fostering community control over natural resources, greater dependence on domestic and local resources and promotion of indigenous culture; and
- *Grounded in the principles of distributive justice and equity* – ensuring equal access to economic growth and markets, and equitable distribution of economic resources.

What can the rich countries do?

Wealthy countries must move more quickly to tear down trade barriers with poor nations, and allow them to at least compete on a partly level playing field – or at least one that is not tilted at a vertical angle in favour of the rich world. This is not even a radical agenda any more – even the World Bank and IMF – for years the architects of inequality in the world – have now realized the error of their ways in promoting neo-liberal policies in developing countries.

Even they have chided wealthy nations for continuing to heavily subsidise their farm sectors and urged industrial nations to honour pledges to end farm subsidies and remove other barriers to poor nations' goods.

What can the poor countries do?

Poor or developing countries must commit to fair elections, respect for

human rights, better education and health care, and financial accountability. Economic sustainability is very important, so they need to get out of the donor-recipient mentality and do what they can to reform and develop their own infrastructure. Western countries can assist by allocating more of their own development aid, tied to social and health programmes in the poor countries, through freer trade and increasing private investment.

Recently Western countries and African nations agreed a programme called NEPAD – New Partnership for African Development. Mechanisms still to be spelled out would review performance on both sides. The idea is that African countries should set up their own standards of fair play and governance that they can be held accountable for and that this will also link to development aid from the West. African leaders in particular have too readily excused each other's shortcomings in the name of African solidarity.

There is no 'magic bullet' to deal with the entrenched problem of hunger in the world. It requires political leadership in encouraging democratic governments in the world, including support for multi-party elections, open public discussions, elimination of press censorship, and also economic support for independent news media and rapid dissemination of information and analysis. It also requires visionary economic policies that both encourage trade (especially allowing exports from poorer countries into the markets of the rich), but also reforms (involving patent laws, technology transfer etc.) to dramatically reduce deprivation in the poorer countries. The problem of hunger has to be seen as being embedded in larger issues of global poverty and deprivation.

What can social workers do?

We have been moving between local actions and global responsibilities in tackling poverty. It is sometimes said that the major role for social workers is to bridge the gap between the local and the global. To achieve this will require some reframing of the social work role, and of the context of practice. No longer can we 'think globally, act locally', but rather it has become necessary to think and act at

both local and global levels and to link the two.

The IFSW recently went through an exhaustive process over several years – some might say an almost impossible task – of redefining the social work profession to fit the realities of the 21st century. The end product emphasizes that social work in its various forms addresses *the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments*. The definition concluded that social work's mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. High-sounding words – but what does this all mean in practice? What does it mean to say that social work should intervene at the points where people interact with their environments? What are these environments and how do they impact on ordinary people, and therefore on the social work profession that is working with them?

The search for a definition of social work within the IFSW – which only ended in the year 2000 – inevitably led to a consideration of the concept of globalisation and its impact on the profession. There have been substantial criticisms by authors such as Midgley (1981) that Western models have dominated the growth and direction of social work, as they have in so many other professions during the twentieth century – and this has led to a kind of overwhelming conservative and individualistic orientation that in a way overwhelmed local concepts and actions. The historical predominance of casework over groupwork and community development was one indicator of this bias, although of course case-based practice can be systemic, inclusive and empowering in its own right.

Yet social work's history in the developing world has shown powerful conceptual tools to break into the realm of power, politics and privilege. For example Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, who incidentally was the keynote speaker to the biennial IFSW meeting in Stockholm, developed the idea of *conscientisation* or reconceptualisation as a way of breaking the 'culture of silence' in which poor and oppressed people were disempowered and unable to take action to improve their circumstances. From this way of thinking educators, or

social workers needed to develop solidarity with exploited people and help them build their own confidence and solidarity. This approach emphasises the need for the re-thinking, re-structuring and strengthening of social work practice, geared to the real needs experienced by the communities and groups that social workers work with. In another context Saul Alinsky provided a similar call for action among exploited and marginalized people in western countries.

Social development

Another concept, which comes from Africa this time, is the idea of social development – a holistic and appropriate methodology of social action, linked to broad social and economic development goals. Social development emphasises the interconnectedness of peoples' needs and is an approach that encourages institutional change, particularly at local or national government level to make social policies, agencies and social services as flexible and dynamic as possible in meeting social need.

As far as resources permit, social work practitioners thus become involved in human development on a broad level, in supporting and facilitating improvements in social conditions in health, housing, education, employment, agriculture, and so on. Social workers work closely with people, finding out and responding to their expressed needs, but they are also active at a wider policy level, doing what they can to make conditions more tolerable and even helpful to the people they are working with.

Consequently the work of social workers needs to be complemented by policy reforms at a senior government level, and hopefully at a regional and international level, which will make the overall economic, social and political climate conducive to development and which is 'people-friendly', rather than 'people-hostile'.

Social work values

Social work values are human values or ideals – that of justice and human dignity and worth of the person, regardless of gender, age or ethnicity, cultural background, physical ability or sexual orientation. With these comes the desire for social justice and equality and social development for a better life. Obviously there is a gap between values and reality and social workers work to bridge this through the elimination of discrimination, injustice and oppression.

I want to go back to using a term that may have become rather over-used, but which I feel is still very valid – that of *empowerment*. We disempower people every day – by taking decisions for them, by removing the opportunities for civic and political engagement, by treating them as inferior, by stigma and discrimination, by treating them like children, by undermining their economic self-sufficiency. We can't give empowerment to people, but we can help them find empowerment for themselves. *At the workshop yesterday we also agreed that we needed to recapture our passion for change and respect for local cultures. We came up with a statement that 'each little community is, in itself, intrinsically important and integral to the global community'.*

I want to suggest three important steps that social work can take to meet this challenge.

1. Be more aware of what is happening on a global level and how this impacts on the people and groups you work with – and its impact on the profession. On a practical level work more through the associations and IFSW to strengthen the profession's voice.
2. Develop an empowerment framework to your work that helps people ask their own indigenous questions and find their own indigenous solutions. On a practical level work with community groups, citizen groups, action groups, consumer organizations, self-help groups and try to link individual people who are facing rough times with others who might help them.
3. Become more active and concerned yourself as a social worker about poverty, globalisation and marginalisation. On a practical level start accessing the Internet more, read more widely on political and social issues, be more concerned and involved. Difficult when you're exhausted every day from your caseload, but if you don't care as someone whose profession is social care, then who will? Globalisation is something we can't stop happening and is part of the post Cold-war world and advancing technology. But we can – and should – as social workers champion the interests of the poor and oppressed throughout the world, and do this as part of our profession that is supposed to have such a strong commitment to human rights.