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Globalization, Culture, and Human Development: Constraints for Rural Uganda

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Abstract

This paper addresses the concerns brought about by globalization in a bid to ensure human development for Uganda, and the cultural impediments in the process. It is based on the Human Development perspective which focuses on 'well being for all' through participation. We explore the cultural impediments in the attainment of Human Development, entrenched in the social systems of the south that differ from those of the north, using the Ugandan case. Research was conducted in Western Uganda in 2003 using participatory methodologies, and findings can be generalized to the rest of rural Uganda.

Key words: Globalization, culture, human development, gender biases, socio-economic pressures, participation, well being, Uganda.

Introduction

Since 1948, with the adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights from which originates the economic social and cultural rights as entitlements for every human being, poverty became an issue of global concern. Accordingly, every human being has a right to development which entitles them to equal access to opportunities; social services like healthcare, shelter and education; and no one should be deprived of food, wealth or income (UNHCR, 1998). Development has hence become a human rights issue, and human rights have become both a component of human development (which can be summarized as wellbeing for all) and a means to achieving it (through participation) (Jones-Bos, 2003). This was further emphasized in many other global fora including the Copenhagen Declaration for Social Development reached at during the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. The fact that worldwide, men and women especially those living in poverty should be facilitated to exercise the rights, utilize the resources and share the responsibilities that enable them to lead satisfying lives and to contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and humankind was amplified at the summit (WSSD, 1995). In the Millennium Declaration of 2000, a commitment was made to ensure that the right to development becomes a reality for everyone to enable the entire human race benefit from the fundamental freedom from want. This is also clearly high-lit in the UN Millennium Development goals to be achieved by 2015 (WSSD, 1995; UNDP, 2000; UNHCR, 1998; Jones-Bos, 2003). The need to eliminate poverty has therefore been a global concern. The 1997 UN Human development report engendered the Human development perspective with issues of empowerment, participation, and capacitation being catchwords for most development initiatives as the globalization process intensifies.

This paper addresses the concerns brought about by globalization in a bid to ensure human development for Uganda and the cultural impediments in the process. The main contention is that social factors, like health, and education of both the current and future generation matter greatly for Uganda to achieve human development. However, like other developing countries, Uganda faces cultural impediments ingrained in social systems different from those of the industrialized world, deriving from uneven globalization; Social systems that are biased against women, social and economic pressures to have large families and the resultant high population growth, tropical diseases, poor nutrition, etc which are unlikely to foster human development as expected in the global context. With the world's cultures being integrated while upholding cultural liberty, a conflict arises that restrains the achievement of human development for Uganda. The concept of human development is analyzed with in the global and local contexts and limitations for Uganda are identified and examined. The main argument is that the disparities in local and global social systems coupled with uneven globalization inhibit the achievement of human

development in Uganda. The paper concludes that foremost, Ugandans have to be empowered to enlarge their choices while realizing their cultural liberty. Less of that, we might have to define specific methodologies targeting to achieve human development in Uganda and else where in the south, and move away from the generic global presumption.

The paper is based on findings of a study carried out in Rushenya County, Ntugamo District in South Western Uganda. The study's principle objective was to explore the cultural factors affecting the rural people's prospects to achieve human development in Uganda. The study area is largely a rural area inhabited by peasants of Nyankole ethnicity, and subsistence agriculture is their major source of livelihood. The area is mainly occupied by two categories of Banyankole; the cattle keepers (Bahima), and the cultivators (Bairu). The study covered both categories of inhabitants in the area. Data was collected over a period of 6 months of intensive ethnographic field work. In addition to participant observation, 145 in-depth interviews 22 oral histories that became case studies, and 3 focus group discussions (taken from a sample of 100 families, and 1 savings and credit society that also became a case study), were carried out. The 'ability to make choices' was used as the major indicator in assessing people's prospects to achieve Human Development. The findings of the study may be generalized to the rest of rural Uganda since the parameters are largely the same.

Human development in the local and global contexts

Uganda is one of the world's poorest countries, but has since 1986 experienced a remarkable political and economic transformation. Real GDP has grown by 6.3 percent in 2001/2002 from the previous 5.7 percent witnessed in 1999/2000. The proportion of people living below the poverty line has declined from 56 percent in 1992, to 44 percent in 1997, and to 35 percent in 2000 (MFPED 2003:102). However, these positive indicators may not necessarily translate into improvements in the quality of people's lives. High GDP may be accompanied by rising disparities in incomes and assets, and it may actually translate into very little or no social justice.

As the Human Development perspective suggests there is need to refocus away from narrow income and growth based indicators of development, to indicators that show how people's lives are fairing (UNDP, 1997; UNDP, 2003). There should be interventions to improve social equity, and enhance provision of basic needs as well as the productive and creative capabilities for individuals and communities so that they can set and meet their development goals. This means that as a developing country, Uganda needs to focus on social and human development aspects.

According to the UN Human Development (HD) perspective, development entails much more than a rise or fall in incomes and GDP. As such, the basic purpose of development is to enlarge people's choices so that they can lead the kind of lives that they value. Development is thus much more than economic growth, which is only a means of enlarging people's choices. HD seeks to create an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives according to their own needs and interests. This is only possible by building their human capabilities to lead long and healthy lives; to be knowledgeable; to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living; and to be able to participate in the life of the community, and in making decisions that affect their lives (UNDP, 1997; UNDP, 2003). Indeed there is unrivalled consensus among the development professional community that empowering people and enabling them to participate in the process of development by fostering an enabling environment to enhance equitable distribution for them is the way to go. According to Jones-Bos (2003), development is about "giving the poor and the vulnerable a stake, a voice, and protection in society". This implies that development requires investing in people especially, in education and health, which, as dimensions of well being, have an impact on poverty and many other dimensions of wellbeing. As such we need to adopt the HD approach.

The government of Uganda has identified with the need to foster human development. The Uganda Poverty Status Report of 2003 identifies improvements in quality of life as the ultimate objective of poverty reduction. As such the government has among other things focused efforts on provision of basic health care and basic education, without which many choices are automatically unavailable, and many opportunities in life remain inaccessible (MFPED 2003; 141). However, in doing so in this era of globalization, Uganda as a nation and as a society faces limitations and challenges. This is because the social system on which the development interventions are based differs greatly from those on which human development is founded with in the context of globalization.

Globalization can be defined as a process of integrating the world's culture, technology, governance and economy whereby worldwide, people are becoming interconnected to one another's events. Through globalization,

... events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe, resulting in a multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system (Berner, E. 1997:65).

Globalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon applicable to a variety of forms of social action – economic, political, cultural, and technological - and sites of social action. (Perraton et al 1997:258). In the process, the population of the world is increasingly bonded into a single society. It refers to changes that are highly charged socially and politically. The concept implies that the creation of a global society is no longer the project of a hegemonic nation-state but the undirected outcome of social interaction on a global scale.

Globalisation is however uneven; depending on who and where you are, it affects people and nations around the world differently; its extent, benefits and disadvantages are uneven in intensity and geographical scope, domestically and internationally, and it affects your ability to cope with the global precedents. It has a different impact on relative positions of those initiating the action (the industrialized countries – more of winners), and those at the receiving end (the non-industrialized/industrializing and the third world – more of losers). As such, the world is being polarized in such a way that poor people and poor nations are at a risk of being pushed to the margin in the emergence of a global social structure, making them indefinitely underdeveloped and dependant on the developed world (Guimaraes, 1998; Holton, 1999; Berner and Conyers 1998). Attempts to achieve human development in developing countries are not exceptional to this trend. Besides, setting of the indicators for HD was indeed done in the global context without paying attention to global cultural diversity and the resultant impediments. In the next section, we discuss how cultural impediments inhibit the achievements of HD in the study area in the globalization era.

Cultural Impediments

In its broadest definition, culture refers to that part of the totality of human action, which is socially as opposed to genetically acquired. It refers to that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society – everything that is socially learned and shared by the members of society (Mann, 1994). Culture in this paper is used according to Goodenough's (1971), definition as a set of beliefs or standards, shared by a group of people, which help the individual decide what is, what can be, how to feel, what to do and how to go about doing it. In simple terms, it means a people's way of life (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1998). Culture plays an important part in shaping human behavior according to the beliefs entrenched in the customs or traditions of a particular society.

Like many other countries, Uganda is a heterogeneous society with a multiplicity of ethnic groups each with its own culture. Each of the ethnic groups has their own expectations from its members according to the social norms in a particular society to which members must conform. Culture therefore shapes the social system in Uganda on which development is based. Mann (1994) defines a social system to imply stable interconnections between institutional patterns within society. In this paper the concept of social system is used in simple terms to refer to all the mutually reinforcing components that affect what happens in a particular society, how it happens and when. The social system in Uganda is certainly much different from the global social system on which the tenet of human development is founded. Ideally, the Ugandan culture and social system form part of the global social structure so that when you prescribe ways of achieving human development, you imply a uniform methodology. But this is the ideal situation because Uganda's position and that of Ugandans in the global social structure (among the losers) makes the social systems within incompatible with the global social structure and its expectations. This is largely because of cultural impediments in the development process.

The major cultural issues that affect human development for Uganda are those that make the social systems in Uganda different from global social systems. In this paper, we are concerned about the those cultural aspects that inhibit prospects for people to enlarge their choices; those that affect their prospects for equal opportunities in terms of access to education, health care, assets, and services, as well as their possibilities to participate in making decisions that concern their lives. This paper captures two major cultural aspects that explicitly emerged in the

study; gender biases, and social economic pressures from the society and the family. The study also investigated the extent of peoples' participation in community activities and decision making in the study area.

a) Gender biases

Research findings indicated that even after implementation of UPE⁷¹, many girls are still unable to go to school. Many families still do not give as much value to the education of girls as they do to that of boys. At the time of the study, only 21 percent of the girls aged 5 – 18 years in the study area, went to school, compared to boys of the same age group, of whom 45 percent went to school⁷². This means that the majority of girls in the study area (79 percent) do not go to school. Such girls or women can never be able to enlarge their choices, because their horizons are small, they are unable to make any decisions or participate in development activities.

Women⁷³ had different reasons for their disfavor of girls' education compared to men. The major reasons given by women and mothers was that they needed girls at home to help them with the household chores, since household chores according to the culture of the area are largely for women. Women do most of the work in the household including fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking, washing clothes and dishes, looking after young children, and all the work that results in crop production. Most men do not do any work in the household. Only a few men participate in tending to the animals in households which rear them. Mothers felt that they would not be able to cope with the household chores on their own if they allowed their daughters to go to school. Mothers seemed to attach some importance to school but there were limitations beyond their control. The most reason given by fathers was that sending girls to school would delay them to get married and this means the family would not reap from bride price early enough. Besides, even if you sent the girls to school, they might get pregnant and drop out, or even get married before graduating in any trade, and this would tantamount to a waste of time and money. One parent said, "*Omwishiki kwakura ashwerwa, kandi yagabwa aryowenki?*" which translates into "after all when a girl is of age she should marry". The study also revealed that compared to 42 percent for men, only 35 percent of all the women interviewed could read and write in the local language⁷⁴.

Gender biases specifically against women affect their access to knowledge, their ability to participate in activities and in decision making that concern their lives; and their access to health services which certainly reduces their life expectancy and hence that of their children. They also affect their income earning capacity and their ability to organize into social groups, and hence their overall empowerment.

Findings of the study also indicated that men take an upper hand in what happens to women and girls in the society. They control their dressing, their work, their earnings, their political inclination, where they go and what they say, and generally their entire lives. It was revealed that although there are some women's groups supported by NGOs, most men don't want their wives to be part of them and for those who allow, men still find ways of controlling the benefits they derive from there. One of the women who had got credit from a women's group supported by Feed the Children Uganda, and rears goats for sale said her husband controls the proceeds from her business and only gives her money to deposit on paying back the loan.

I got a loan and bought 2 goats, now I have fifteen... I do all the work related to looking after them. I even take them to the market. But its my husband who sells because as a woman am not allowed... When he sells a goat, he buys salt, soap, and paraffin, and he keeps the rest of the money. When I need money to deposit on my loan he gives me on the day of the meeting... (Married woman, in Kimara village).

Even for women who have attained considerable levels of education, as long as they are married, their husbands and their boy children want to control their everything. Women and girl children lack a meaningful voice in domestic and community affairs especially in associations, economic activities, reproduction and family planning. Freedom of association and movement is not available to them. Some women are not allowed to join any social group like women's clubs, by their husbands. This restricts their participation in community activities. They are not allowed to do any income generating activity or any work outside the home, yet they are not paid for all the domestic work they do in the household. Besides, women have special health needs related to their roles as mothers which, coupled with their long hours of work undermines them as human beings.

⁷¹ Universal Primary Education.

⁷² By school is meant any arrangement focused on imparting or attaining formal education such as primary school, secondary school, teacher training college, vocational college or university.

⁷³ In this paper, by a woman is meant any female 18 years and above, and by a man is meant any male 18 years and above. Women and men is also interchangeably used to mean mothers and fathers.

⁷⁴ For both men and women only 5 percent could read and write simple English.

MFPED (2003: 172) identified the persistent unequal gender relations in the household and poor quality of life for the majority of Ugandans as major factor fostering poor welfare within households. All these derive from the Uganda social system which, because it is based on the Ugandan culture is unfriendly to the ideals of human development as a development strategy. Findings of the study indicate that the most important reasons affecting women's ability to enlarge their choices are cultural. While HD at the global context seeks better health, more knowledge, and higher life expectancy for Uganda, it is still a flawless goal for women. The cultures have no room for their well-being and participation which respectively form the major components and the utmost means for achieving HD (Jones-Bos, 2003). Ugandan women are therefore completely de-linked from the globalization process due to gender biases and the achievement of HD is not about to happen to them.

b) Social & economic pressures

Another factor that derives from culture is the social and economic pressures accruing to members of a particular culture. In this section, we discuss the three major pressures uncovered in the study; the size of the family one is expected to have; the obligations to look after the old and other dependants; and the stages of life one is expected to go through as prescribed by culture. We look at the first two simultaneously.

(i) Pressures to have large families and the resultant dependency syndrome

61 percent of the families from which respondents were drawn had 6 children and above. Two responses were given by almost all the families that had 6 children and above. One was that children are the insurance parents have when they are old in terms of providing for them. Besides, parents can educate some of the children well; they stand a chance of uplifting their status. Many parents indicated that they hoped to depend on their children when they are old. On how they would be able to educate many children, most of the families assumed that the older children would educate their younger siblings. Another response connected to this was that with the coming of HIV/AIDS, parents are producing many children to guard against being childless in case some of them have to fall victims to the disease. Besides, parents looked at girls as a source of wealth in terms of bride price when they get married. The second most common response was that society expects women to have many children. One woman who had 7 children said "*omukazi owekitinnisa akiha omu kuzara akakanyisa oruganda rwiiba* " implying that a woman derives respect from producing many children to expand her husband's clan.

The study therefore revealed that social systems ingrained in culture greatly affect the extent to which people in the study area can achieve human development. Since they produce many children, apart from their complacent value for education, the extent to which they can educate all the children is its self limited in terms of resources. This affects many other dimensions of well-being including high population growth; poor nutrition; reduced access to assets and services; and all associated problems, which conflicts with the would be efforts to achieve human development.

(ii) Expectations for staged lives

Another pressure that resulted from the interview was that parents have an expectation of the children to live some kind of staged life. Girls are expected to get married latest by the age of 16 so that they have a husband, and later to have children. The same applies to boys latest by the age of 18. The implication is that a girl is expected to live her life in stages of girl – wife – mother – grandmother and so on; and a boy is expected to live his life in stages of boy – husband – father – grandfather and so on. This affects the possibility for girls to remain in school for long, or to refrain from being wives so that they can be able to make their own decisions free of any one else, and hence human development for them is a myth. Besides, many children who would have otherwise been in school to attain education – one of the two major dimensions of well being and empowerment, end up being wives and husbands prematurely. Socio-economic pressures deriving from culture therefore inhibit people's wellbeing as well as their ability to participate in activities and in making decisions that concern them.

c) People's Participation

The ability for people to participate in making decisions that concern them and in community activities was also explored with the aim of establishing their prospects for achieving HD. The study specifically investigated participation for men, women, and children in social activities (mainly religious, social gatherings, and cultural functions like marriage ceremonies); economic activities (mainly income earning projects); and politics.

The study established that children⁷⁵ are supposed to take what their parents tell them. They do not attend village meetings, and have no voice at all. Parents make all the decisions for them and tell them what to do. They only have a voice when they have their own economic activity, or get married. According to Phillips (2000), the concept of participation applies to all, who seek to benefit from the development process, whether children, or adults. As for women, their participation is limited to the women's tasks culturally. Mainly, they participate in food preparation and serving on social functions, and singing in the church and at functions. When women attend meetings, apart from the minute secretary (usually a woman), they mainly listen to men's ideas. It came out explicitly that in the study area, culturally, a woman is not expected to oppose the idea of a married man because this tantamounts to disrespect for the man in the presence of his peers. Women were considered to participate in politics since they are represented by a woman on local council committees. But with a woman occupying only 1 out of 9 positions on the local council committee, in a society where women are not expected to oppose men, it goes without saying that she is a drop in the ocean.

Men dominate the decisions taken and activities conducted in the study area. They dominate politics; they coordinate all activities be they religious, social, political or cultural; in terms of arrangements, speeches, discussions, and resultant impressions. They also dominate economic activities especially, contributions in meetings and the resultant decisions taken. In Kimara Savings and Credit Society, out of the 12 Executive Committee members, only 2 were women. At the time of the study, out of 15 members who had borrowed money from the society totaling to Uganda shillings 5.5 million, only 1 was a lady who had borrowed Uganda shillings 100,000. Men dominate in religious activity because they are the religious leaders; they dominate in politics because most politicians are men; they dominate other social activities, because all opinion leaders men; and they dominate economic activities because they are men, and after all, they are the literate as compared to women, and the culture its self empowers them to dominate.

Implications

As UNDP has long argued, that at its best, human development is about enabling the people to live the kind of lives that they choose and providing the tools and opportunities to enable them make these choices, the study based on 'the ability to make choices' as the indicator of their prospects to achieve human development.

The fact that education levels are still not about to promise such capabilities and knowledge, which determine human well being, implies that their ability to achieve human development by global standards is not in the foreseeable future.

Gender biases coupled with social and economic pressures as prescribed by culture hinder the achievement of HD. We note that in the globalization era, where the world's cultures are being integrated, emphasis is on the other hand being put on cultural liberty as a crucial component of human development. Indeed, UNDP (2004) has it that,

"Human development requires more than health, education, a decent standard of living and political freedom. People's cultural identities must be recognized and accommodated by the state, and people must be free to express these identities without being discriminated against in other aspects of their lives. In short: cultural liberty is a human right and an important aspect of human development ..."

If we have to respect cultural liberty⁷⁶ as a component of HD, then the Ugandan case represents a classic case of a conflict situation within the HD perspective, since Ugandan women in their present capacity are unable to participate as a means of achieving HD and are hence excluded when talking about 'well being for all'. It was noted that Ugandans rely on their culture in making many decisions about their lives. Respecting their cultural liberty therefore means that the gender biases, social and economic pressures from the family and the community, and other limitations to participation are justified in their view, which is the conflict facing the HD paradigm.

If we look at HD in its totality; as enabling the people to enlarge their choices, and participation as the means, the fact that due to cultural constraints, the limited extent of people's capacity to participate in making decisions that concern them depicts the extent of the limit to achievement of HD in the study area, and generally in rural Uganda. After all, who defines the indicators; who defines capacity, knowledge, well being or participation? And

⁷⁵ In the paper, by children we mean boys and girls 18 years and below who are still unmarried and depend on their parents, and do not pay graduated tax.

⁷⁶ Cultural liberty is used in this paper to refer to the ability to recognize, accommodate and respect peoples' cultural identities in development interventions. The concept is the theme of the UNDP (2004) Human Development Report and in which it emerges as a major component of Human Development anywhere.

with the cultural constraints, participation is for whom? Is it for everybody, including women and children, or it for the men, religious leaders, opinion leaders, politicians and generally the literate as the findings indicate?

Conclusions and policy recommendations

The government of Uganda needs to pay very specific attention to development needs resulting from unequal gender relations within the households as well as within the community. This specific attention should address the general education needs of the masses especially to enable men value women as human beings and to create a knowledge society. Specifically, they should address women's education as a long term goal that will empower them to make their own decisions as well as improving their access to services especially health. Even with UPE, there are still lots of reasons why people are not going to school, most of which are cultural. Education is a tool that will enhance capacitating, empowerment, participation, access to services, and the general well being for all, which is what human development seeks to achieve. Ugandans must therefore be empowered to enlarge their choices much as they would like to maintain their cultural liberty. The government also needs to plan for insurance for the aging population since it appears to play a vital role in peoples' decisions to have large families that result into population growth and associated problems.

Culture is a major impediment in as far as achieving HD is concerned. Since Uganda's social system is conservative in relation to the global social system, there might be different ways of targeting to achieve HD for such social systems rather than presuming global methodologies that may not apply in certain societies. This is where the proponents of the HD perspective need to reconsider, as well as researchers in the development studies arena, in a bid to work out context specific methodologies as well as indicators.

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