

The Impact of Globalization on Africa

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Abstract

Globalization as the process of intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries aimed at the transcendental homogenization of political and socio-economic theory across the globe, impacts significantly on African states through systematic restructuring of interactive phases among its nations, by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, commerce, communication and several other fields of endeavor. These processes have impelled series of cumulative and conjectural crisis in the international division of labour and global distribution of economic and political power; thereby qualifying basic African feature to be poverty, diseases, squalor, and unemployment among other crisis of under development. This paper was aimed to examine both the negative and the positive impacts of globalization on African states, and suggest some recommendations among which are to improve democratization process, make the task of poverty eradication more indigenous, etc.

Introduction

Globalization according to Akindele (1990) refers to the process of the intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries. Globalization is principally aimed at the transcendental homogenization of political and socio-economic theory across the globe. It is equally aimed at “making global being present worldwide at the world stage or global arena” (Fafowora, 1998). In other words, as Ohuabunwa, (1999:20) once opined: Globalization can be seen as an evolution which is systematically restructuring interactive phases among nations by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, commerce, communication and several other fields of endeavor.

Simply put, globalization is the term used to describe the changes in societies and the world economy that result from dramatically increased international trade and cultural exchange. Cerry (1994) also said, globalization describes the increase of trade and investment due to the falling of barriers and the interdependence of countries. In specific economic contexts, the term refers almost exclusively to the effects of trade, particularly trade liberalization or “free trade.” Banjo (2000), insisted that the process of globalization is impelled by the series of cumulative and conjectural crisis in the international division of labour and global distribution of economic and political power, in global finance and the functioning of national states.

Within the parameters of the foregoing, globalization could be correctly defined from the institutional perspective as the spread of capitalism (MacEwan, 1990). Beyond this simplistic analysis of globalization in terms of capital inflows and trade investment, it is important to state that Charlick (2000) emphasized that, it has been of disastrous consequences to the governments and people of the African continent. Globalization according to Ohiorhenuan (1998), is the broadening and deepening linkages of national economies into a worldwide market for goods and services, especially capital. As Tandon (1998b) once opined, globalization seeks to remove all national barriers to the free movement of international capital and this process is accelerated and facilitated by the supersonic transformation in information technology.

It is principally aimed at the universal homogenization of ideas, cultures, values and even life styles (Ohiorhenuan 1998:6) as well as, at the *villagization* of the world. Expanding this argument, Gordmier (1998), argued that it is principally concerned with the expansion of trade over the oceans and airspace, beyond traditional alliances which were restricted by old political spheres of influence.

Very critical to our understanding of globalization is the dire need to use it according to Dunning (1998) as a synonym for liberalization and greater openness. It is within this preview we can argue that globalization is mainly a phenomenon of capital mobility. Its two prongs are: (i) foreign direct investment and (ii) international portfolio flows.

The concept of globalization is global and dominant in the world today. It was created by the dominant forces to serve their specific interests. Simultaneously these social forces gave themselves a new ideological name the – “international community”- to go with the idea of globalization (Madunagu, 1999). Globalization has turned the world into a big village... Despite the ambiguities of the concept, the essential nature of globalization is the compression of space and time, as a result, the world becomes one, and interactions among diverse people begin to look like those within a village. Thus terms such as “one world” and “villagization”.

In its contemporary form, globalization is driven by variety of forces. These, Colle (2000) argued are flow of financial and economic resources with particular reference to the flow of goods and services and, to a large extent, labour, technology, transport, communications and information technology, the spread of culture from one corner of the world to the other, and global diffusion of religious ideas as well as ideologies.

Definition of Concept:

What is globalization?

Globalization means different things to different people. Some say it is the movement of people, language, ideas, and products around the world. Others see it as the dominance of multinational corporations and the destruction of cultural identities. Extracting from the “Globalization website”, globalization broadly refers to the expansion of global linkages, the organization of social life on a global scale, and the growth of a global consciousness, hence to the consolidation of world society. Such a definition captures much of what the term commonly means, but its meaning is disputed. It encompasses several large processes; definitions differ in what they emphasize. Globalization is historically complex; definitions vary in the particular driving force they identify. The meaning of the term is itself a topic in global discussion; it may refer to “real” processes, ideas that justify them, or to a way of thinking about them.

History of Globalization

Historically, Devet (1993) submits that; the process of globalization had started in a small way in the nineteenth century. Toyo (2000) records that globalization began when capital moved from Europe to open up new areas in America and Australia, mostly in the building of rail road systems and agriculture that would be central to the expansion of capitalism. The subsequent maturation of joint-stock companies and developments in the areas of banking, industrial capital and technology, aided among other things, the scramble for and partitioning of Africa and, its then attendant rapacious exploitation of these parts of the world. Oluabunwa (1999) argues, even though, the pre-eminence of globalization as championed by America was interrupted by the cold war era, with the effective end of the latter in 1990, the west no longer need to compromise as before, its ideology of globalization culture on the account of communism.

Consequent on this, the global economy continued to experience some fundamental changes in nearly all ramifications including “even the language of global discourse”. This trend is currently being pursued with vigour by the now acclaimed instruments of globalization. Given the historical relationship between Africa and the West it is ironic that the latter is today preaching the virtues of freedom to Africans. Former colonizers and ex-slave-owners have made a virtue of championing political and economic liberalization. Yesterday’s oppressors appear to be today’s liberators, fighting for democracy, human rights and free market economies throughout the world (Obadina, 1998).

Globalization has largely been driven by the interests and needs of the developed world (Grieco and Holmes, 1999). Globalization has turned the world into the big village... This in turn has led to intense electronic corporate commercial war to get the attention and nod of the customer globally... This war for survival can only get more intense in the new millennium. Are we prepared to face the realities of this global phenomenon, which has the potential of wiping out industrial enterprise in Africa (Oluabunwa, 1999)?

Theories of Globalization

Globalization can be viewed as interdependence, and that 'interdependence is again associated with peace and peace increasingly with democracy'. People, firms markets matter most; states matter less,' because it is the economy that drives states to make decisions. As the world becomes more interdependent on one another, decisions are made as a collective whole in the economic field, not the independent political state.

Therefore, globalization means homogeneity of prices, products, rates of interests, etc. a strong economy under globalization requires transparency, but then that transparency might transfer ideologically to the social and political realms as well. It can be argued that this is exemplified in the latecomers' imitation of the practices and adoption of the institution of the countries that have shown the way.

Another globalization theorist, Robinson focuses on economics as well, but further argues that globalization is the spread of capitalism throughout the world. In his views before globalization was relevant, power was battled in conflicts through militaries and physical strength.. Giddens (1997) in his work on globalization posited that it is the process of modernization of the world system through the use of institutions. Secondly, he argues that globalization is multifaceted, that it takes place at all levels and sectors of the society.

He therefore sees globalization as a global economy which is dominated by transnational firms and financial institutions, operating independently. Nations, boundaries and domestic economic considerations, in other words, the term *globalization* implies two processes: Capitalist production and trade replacing protectionist economies through specialization and globalization of the process of production and an integrated market. This has led to an integration of national economies, where uniformity results.

The Impact of Globalization on Africa

In Africa, its position in the international system has been considerably weakened by the fact that it has been losing the race for economic development in general, and human development in particular, to other regions, these poor performances by African countries accounts in part for the political and social instability and rise of authoritarian regimes that have characterized much of postcolonial Africa, further weakening the ability of African countries to deal effectively with globalization. This does not in any way mean that globalization will be discussed on the two sides: positive and negative impacts.

The negative impacts of globalization on Africa

1. Tendon (1998) states that the cold war which was born out of the process for globalization has had significant consequences for Africa. During its height in the 1960's and 1970's, the cold war witnessed the emergence of authoritarian regimes in the form of one-party or military regimes. This was largely a result of the support of the two blocks to keep African countries in their respective camps. This has in turn, substantially reduced Africa's international negotiating power and its ability to maneuver in the international system. In sum then, the cold war and its demise has worked against democracy and economic development in Africa.
2. Specific impact of globalization on Africa were identified according to Oyejide (1998) in the political sphere, the most important consequence is the erosion of sovereignty, especially on economic and financial matters, as a result of the imposition of models, strategies and policies of development on African countries by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.
3. More important is the fact that globalization for most part does not facilitate the establishment of the economic conditions necessary for genuine democracy and good governance to take solid roots and thrives.
4. Economically, globalization has, on the whole, reinforced the economic marginalization of African economies and their dependence on a few primary goods for which demand and prices are externally determined. This has, in turn accentuated poverty and economic inequality as well as the ability of the vast number of Africans to participate meaningfully in the social and political life of their countries.

5. As a result of the cultural domination from outside that goes with globalization, African countries are rapidly losing their cultural identity and therefore their ability to interact with other cultures on an equal and autonomous basis, borrowing from other cultures only those aspects that meet its requirements and needs.
6. The scientific and technological forces unleashed by globalization have facilitated the extinction of the indigenous development of technology and distorting patterns of production in Africa.
7. Globalization on the whole impacts negatively on the development and consolidation of democratic governance. One form of this is the reduction of the capacity of governments to determine and control events in their countries, and thus their accountability and responsiveness to their people, given the fact that the context, institutions and processes by which these decisions are taken are far from democratic.
8. Globalization introduces anti-developmentalism by declaring the state irrelevant or marginal to the developmental effort. Development strategies and policies that focus on stabilization and privatization, rather than growth, development and poverty eradication, are pushed by external donors, leading to greater poverty and inequality and undermining the ability of the people to participate effectively in the political and social processes in their countries. Welfare and other programs intended to meet the basic needs of the majority of the population are transferred from governments to non-governmental organizations that begin to replace governments making them to lose the little authority and legitimacy they have.
9. By imposing economic specialization based on the needs and interests of external forces and transforming the economies of African countries into series of enslaved economies linked to the outside but with very little linkages among them, Democracy, with its emphasis on tolerance and compromise, can hardly thrive in such an environment (Rodrik 1994).
10. Further, Mule (2000) views that the economic specialization imposed on African countries makes rapid and sustainable growth and development impossible, conflicts over the distribution of the limited gains realized from globalization becomes more acute and politicized. Vulnerable groups, such as women, the youth, and rural inhabitants, fare very badly in this contest and are discriminated against. This further erodes the national ethos of solidarity and reciprocity that are essential to successful democracies.
11. Globalization, by insisting on African countries opening their economies to foreign goods and entrepreneurs, limits the ability of African governments to take proactive and conscious measures to facilitate the emergence of an indigenous entrepreneurial class. (Mowlana 1998).
12. Globalization has encouraged illicit trade in drugs, prostitution, pornography, human smuggling, dumping of dangerous waste and depletion of the environment by unscrupulous entrepreneurs.
13. Globalization has freed labour across boundaries and facilitated brain drain. It facilitated “brain drain” in developing countries, thus reducing further their human capacity.

Positive impact of globalization on Africa

1. *Globalization* has eased international trade and commerce, facilitated foreign investment and the flow of capital while calling for greater accountability and responsiveness of leaders to their people, globalization has often pressed African leaders to adopt policies and measures that are diametrically opposed to the feelings and sentiments of vast majority of their people.
2. By defining basic and generally accepted principles of democratic governance, such as good governance, transparency and accountability, in narrow terms, conditioned by particular historical, political, social, and cultural factors, while leaving little or no room for adapting them to different societies and cultures.
3. There are international lobby and pressure groups in various fields. There are universities and institutions of higher learning with all their power to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes that shift behaviours of societies and state leadership as well as followership. All these combine to reinforce the phenomenon of globalization and force the state to shift its behaviour and the way it relates with both its “subjects” and its internal and external partners.

4. Globalization opens people's lives to other cultures and all their creativity and to the flow of ideas and values.
5. Information and communication technologies have eased interaction among countries and peoples.
6. It is creating a global village out of a wide and diverse world.
7. One major positive impact of globalization on Africa is that it has made available information on how other countries are governed and the freedoms and rights their people enjoy.
8. It has also opened African countries to intense external scrutiny and exercised pressure for greater transparency, openness and accountability in Africa.

Possible strategies of controlling the negative effects of globalization on Africa

Having studied the merits and demerits of globalization it becomes obvious that strong African countries are in a better position to fend off these negative consequences and may even see their democracies, economy and military strengthened. Below are the strategies that when adapted will bring the expected merits.

- I. **The overstretched capacity to regulate and protect the environment:** The capacity of most African States to handle issues such as production of harmful chemicals, global warming, depletion of natural resources destruction of organic agriculture, dumping of nuclear waste is still limited. However, as global actors invest and expand their activities, especially related to industrial, agricultural, mining, forest exploitation and fishing, the regulatory capacity of public administration in African countries, which is already limited in many respects is becoming overstretched. The state is getting caught in the middle of tis need to speed development through industrialization, agricultural modernization, exploitation of natural resources, etc. and the pressure of local and global environmentalist groups. Global forces in this respect, rather than putting too much pressure on governments to do what is beyond their capacity, should first and foremost concentrate on strengthening the capacity of these governments in relevant aspects.
- II. **Improve and not undermining the power of the African State:** Most African governments are finding themselves in a situation of "*fait accompli*" when it comes to making certain policies and decisions. International agencies such as the World Bank, IMF, United Nations, World Trade Organizations, etc. take decisions which are binding on African countries. This could be looked at as eroding the sovereignty and power of the State. We must add that this is not only the case in Africa. The poorer the country, the more chance of power erosion in the state. This would be minimized if the voice of Africa's states was increased and strengthened in the world bodies. Stronger African regional bodies would also help in this respect, provided these bodies were represented in the world bodies at the same time.
- III. **Improve the democratization process:** There is an ongoing democratization struggle in Africa. Some African countries began the process of democratizing their governments, political systems and societies sometime back. However, the international partners they are working with in this globalized world are hardly democratic. While the democratization process would require that the people of the country in question get involved in the taking of decisions and policies that concern them, some of the big decisions affecting Africa today are more or less imposed by the globalization players such as the World Bank, IMF, the World Trade Organisation, etc. this has been the case for example with the liberalization and privatization policies in Africa. This makes the people to distrust the democratization rhetoric they hear from their leaders when they are confronted with this "*fait accompli*". There is a discrepancy on the way the same bodies arrive at decisions of great consequences. It is not possible to be seen to as democratic by the people you govern when they do not see or get involved in the process of making the decision and policies used to govern them. This is a big dilemma for African leaders.
- IV. **Improve the overstretched capacity to handle international and computer-based crime:** The African State and its forces of law and order were used to handle "traditional crimes". However, with globalization there has been an increase in crimes (drugs, pornography, international corruption etc.) that had been at lower magnitude. In addition, progress in information technology has facilitated the emergence and growth of computer-based crimes, especially fraud. For this the law enforcement agencies have not been well prepared. The increase in these crimes across borders makes the force of law and order look helpless, unhelpful and incapable.

This tends to erode the confidence of the public in the state, thus weakening further its legitimacy. The strong challenge posed by the powerful criminals on the state creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity in the public, thus reducing the required confidence that would attract both local and foreign investment. There is need to strengthen the capacity of the forces of law and order, especially in the areas of detecting and handling sophisticated crime. If this does not happen, the sophisticated criminals will find ready-made comfortable hiding places in Africa. This will be a big security problem for the rest of the world.

- V. **Making the task of poverty eradication more indigenous:** As global actors pressurize African governments to open up more and more to maximize foreign investments and capital inflows, and as big multinationals and local enterprises utilize this environment to cater for their interests, the government is having less and less room to pay attention to the abject poverty amongst the poor and rich both in and between countries. The African State will have to be encouraged to pay more attention to the fate of its poor populace than to the fate of big global actors. The big global actors can talk for themselves with little problem. The issue is: who will talk for the poor?
- VI. **Avoid Debt accumulation and the debt burden:** The phenomenal debt burden of African countries is well known. Most of the accumulation of this debt over time was as much a result of the incapacity of the borrowers to pay back as it was of the ease with which the lenders gave money to the countries. This was, and still is, facilitated by the context of globalization. The paradox about this is that the governments borrow in the name of poverty reduction, while their social spending that would go towards alleviating poverty remains low. In the same way, the rich countries that lend money rarely allocate their financing towards social goals (see “Debt and sustainable Human Development”. Technical Advisory Paper # 4, MDGD, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP, May 1999). There is a strong need for both national governments and external partners to shift their spending towards sustainable human development.
- VII. **Control Drain on the human capacity of the State:** Globalization has opened borders and relatively freed labour movements. But for African countries this has aggravated the problem of brain drain, which has existed for a long time. Although most African countries with appropriate financial policies receive remittances from their nationals working abroad, it is not clear whether the contribution of some of the most qualified to the process of developing their countries would not be more than the remittances they send back home from “exile”. It is noted, however, that this problem should not be over simplified. Some of the most qualified Africans ran away from their countries because of the negative behavior of the regimes themselves. In other words, this human capacity in some instances is frightened away by brutal regimes rather than being attracted by globalization forces as such. This problem can be appropriately tackled if the African leadership put their house in order.
- VIII. **Indigenization of public expectations and social demands:** The interaction between local socio-politico-economic forces and global actors has generated new and or different demands from African societies and this has increased pressure on the public administration system to re-adjust to these demands constantly. Examples of such demands include: the demand for transparency and accountability, democracy, a clean environment, gender equality, human rights and freedoms, poverty eradication, competent leadership, effective service delivery and applying New Public Management approaches in public administration. These demands require that public administration systems and practices accordingly re-adjust consistently. In most cases, these demands are expressed by the private sector and civil society both national and international, without considering the cost of what it would take to meet them. This is often beyond the capacities of African states. Moreover, some of the demands from international circles are not in line with the contextual realities in Africa. The conclusion here is that globalization has posed enormous challenges for the African public administration systems.

It put excessive demands on their capacities (institutions, structures, skills, knowledge; network, technology, facilities, equipment, etc.), which, as everyone knows, has always been very weak, the systems themselves being still nascent. Managing globalization effectively to benefit the African people, especially the poor, calls for new attitudes and leadership.

It requires vision, appropriate knowledge, skills and wisdom from Africa's leaders. But it also requires sensitivity, willingness, a change of attitude and the right technical assistance from global actors such as the United Nations, especially in supporting the strengthening of Africa's public administration capacity to deal with issues of globalization.

IX. Economic Development Paradigms, Models, Strategies and Policies

As has already been made clear, development strategies and policies followed by African countries are increasingly those formulated by outsiders, which are then uncritically imposed on African countries as a condition for aid, investments, trade access, and political and military support. Not surprisingly, these strategies and policies serve more the interests of external forces rather than those of the African people they claim to be assisting. In articulating a new approach to the economic development of Africa, emphasis should be placed on the question of the nature, ownership, management, allocation, utilization and distribution of resources.

X. Action at the level of citizens and civil society

It is evident that the most important resource of any country is its citizens. African leaders should therefore concentrate their efforts on educating their people, sensitizing and educating them on their civic, social, economic and cultural rights and responsibilities, and empowering them so that they could defend their rights and interests while contributing fully to the overall development of their countries. To achieve this objective, African countries must invest heavily in building, developing and maintaining their capital, especially health and educational facilities that cater for the broad masses of the people rather than a few elite. For only by developing its human resources would African countries be in the position to deal effectively with the outside world. Stated below is how **Africa should respond to globalization:**

1. Be open to uncertainty, ambiguity, and change; develop and strengthen public administration systems that are change-oriented.
2. Adhere to openness and accountability, especially to the African people, so as to be seen to be democratic and sensitive to the problems of the local people.
3. Adopt a proactive approach to globalization so that the challenges it poses and the benefits it offers can be foreseen and planned for. The reality of globalization force changes it.
4. Address human capacity needs from a comprehensive angle (skills, knowledge, attitude, networks, and information technology).
5. Address institutional capacity needs (i.e., create and/or strengthen institutions that are change-oriented, outward-looking and able to interact meaningfully with global actors). These institutions must be in all spheres of politics and public administration and they must be tailored to have the ability to network with the private sector, civil society and the international community.
6. Adopt flexible approaches and methods of administration as opposed to inflexible rule application and inward-looking bureaucracies.
7. Strive to increase and strengthen the voice of African governments in international bodies (such as the United Nations) to offset the weakness created by the pressure of global actors at the local level). The decision-power of world bodies is eroding the decision of states.
8. Adopt and practice participatory governance involving all actors (governments, the private sector, civil society, both national and international, as well as world bodies).
9. Embrace the application of information technology in public administration practice (e-government).
10. Develop social capital, especially by investing in the education and health sectors. Such an attitude would then create a mindset for self-assessment and appraisal to see how the weakness can be conquered.

Conclusion

African countries themselves and those that hope to assist them must first and foremost recognize this fact and commit resources and energies to harnessing the capacity of the African poor for their development. It is hoped that the global actors will realize that it is not beneficial to them or to anyone else to play globalization-game without the poor. For globalization to ultimately be beneficial to everyone-the rich and the poor-all must have certain levels of capacity that permit them to effectively participate in the game.

The current world, where resources and benefits are concentrated in the hands of very few, is not a comfortable world for anybody. And to sustain it is to breed future insecurity as the mass of the poor strives to get a share of the riches concentrated in the hands of the few. It is clear that globalization benefits those who have the capacity to harness it but can be very detrimental to those whom it finds not prepared. Most African States are not prepared, especially in terms of having the requisite capacity.

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