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## **Globalization and Environment Sustainability**

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### **Abstract**

*Globalization means the process whereby geographical distance becomes a less important factor in the establishment and development of cross-border economic, political and socio-cultural relations. Networks of relationships and dependencies acquire a growing potential to become international and world-wide. Initially globalization was seen as a widening, deepening and accelerating of the interconnection on a worldwide scale of all aspects of contemporary social life, from culture to criminality, from finance to the spiritual sphere. Today, the term globalization has almost become cliché with time and a new concept has emerged with globalization known as sustainable development to ensure that economic growth is also socially just and environmentally sustainable. Indeed, the topic "Globalization and sustainable development", is at the top of today's international agenda, covering a wide range of issues, such as, inter alia, trade, development, environment, resources management, development cooperation, international governance. In this sense, globalization and sustainable development have evolved as two sides of a common vision of our future. Sustainable development has been adopted by the United Nations as a guiding principle for economic, environmental, and social development that aspires to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (United Nations 1987). In this context, sustainable development demands the protection of the environment and natural resources as well as to provide social and economic welfare to the present and to subsequent generations (Elliott, 2012). This paper will address the impact of globalization on sustainable development and will also highlight the role Global Governance in achieving social and environmental sustainability.*

### **Introduction**

Globalization means the process whereby geographical distance becomes a less important factor in the establishment and development of cross-border economic, political and socio-cultural relations. Networks of relationships and dependencies acquire a growing potential to become international and world-wide. Initially globalization was seen as a widening, deepening and accelerating of the interconnection on a worldwide scale of all aspects of contemporary social life,

from culture to criminality, from finance to the spiritual sphere. Today, the term globalization has almost become cliché with time and a new concept has emerged with globalization known as sustainable development to ensure that economic growth is also socially just and environmentally sustainable. Indeed, the topic "Globalization and sustainable development", is at the top of today's international agenda, covering a wide range of issues, such as, inter alia, trade, development, environment, resources management, development cooperation, international governance. In this sense, globalization and sustainable development have evolved as two sides of a common vision of our future. Sustainable development has been adopted by the United Nations as a guiding principle for economic, environmental, and social development that aspires to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (United Nations 1987).

### **Impact of Globalization on Sustainable Development**

Globalisation today is something more than a purely economic occurrence manifesting itself on a global scale and has produced significant gains at the global level. Because of globalization, foreign trade in goods and services, capital, technology and labour all move more freely across borders. In addition to economic gains, there have been significant benefits in the areas of culture and governance too. Public awareness in issues such as human rights, democracy and gender equality has increased significantly because of the greater access to newspapers, radio, television, telephones, computers and the internet. These developments have arguably led to improved allocative efficiency which in turn has enhanced growth and human development.

Globalisation at the same time is also perceived as creating new threats to individuals, societies and eco-systems. Debate still goes on the fact that it may aggravate the gap between rich and poor both within and across countries, creating new threats to human security in terms of financial volatility, political and cultural insecurity and environmental degradation. As such, although according to some, there are some beneficial, innovative and dynamic aspects of globalisation; others are perturbed by the fact that it creates disruption and marginalisation such as population growth and migration, the emergence of infectious diseases, widening disparities in development world-wide, climate change, an accelerating loss of bio-diversity and the scarcity and pollution of fresh-water resources. It is often seen that many developed nations in order to protect the environment impose strict limitations and restrictions on pollution and waste. A consequence of these restrictions is that the companies that employ people send the jobs to countries where the environmental standards are much less stringent. Thus, although the environment is better served by the laws

against environmental degradation, the economies of those nations suffer. And although jobs come to the less developed nations thereby boosting the economies there, the environment suffers because the restrictions against pollution are less strict.

Globalization which is also linked with the exportation of technologies and activities can have detrimental effects on the ecosphere. For example, globalizations of metal recovery technologies have major impacts on the earth's crust. When rudimentary technologies are used, 90% of the materials extracted from the ground for conversion into products is discarded. Although less invasive technologies are often available, adoption can be highly capital intensive and unsuitable for adoption in many regions. (Socolow et al. 1994)

Most of the indigenous industries in the developing world produced simple goods by employing labour-intensive technology. However, lesser developed countries, lured by the western concept of development, have switched their production focus to modern goods that require extensive infrastructure and industrial projects. Modern industrial plants and infrastructure, in turn, require megaprojects in the energy sector. Usually, this energy is provided by large hydroelectric dams and nuclear power stations (Khor, 1996). In numerous cases, people are displaced. At times, health concerns surface due to irrigation canals that spread malaria and other water-borne diseases.

Thus what is prominent from the above discussion is that globalization can have both positive and negative impact on sustainability of economies. Some of the impacts are as follows:

- Relative efficiency of energy use is improving but development and increased affluence lead to larger demands for materials and energy.
- Exports of extracted commodities provide valuable foreign exchange but environmental costs associated with the extraction are staggering.
- Green revolution has undoubtedly increased crop yield through new seed varieties and imported technology. However, it requires high amount of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, agricultural machinery and irrigation.
- Even though globalization has led to the creation and transfer of more efficient technologies on one hand, it had led to increased environmental degradation from factories in countries without environmental protection laws.
- Globalization has led to export of logs to industrial nations thus clearing of land for cattle grazing. This has led to heavy soil erosion due to removal of tree cover, reduced intake of water in rain catchment areas, extensive flooding, and climate change.

- Globalization has increased opportunity for education and training in some countries. But it has caused downward pressure for wages, poor health conditions for workers in some countries and decreased the power of unions in some other countries.

The sustainability of globalisation may or may not be in the same direction for all nations. Some countries may experience an improved local environment as a result of the globalisation process whereas others experience a deteriorating one. The same applies for social or economic effects of the globalisation process. Furthermore, what is relevant from the above discussion is that sustainable development in one domain may not necessarily related to a sustainable development in another domain and what is sustainable for a country may be not for the global environment. Even though, globalisation thrives for sustainable development of environment, societies and the economic system, yet it is unlikely to achieve all of these objectives simultaneously.

### **Co - existence of Globalization and Environment Sustainability**

As more emphasis is put on the globalization of industry, the need for environmental sustainability although as important as ever is often not included in the conversation. While the importance of the relationship between globalization and the environment is obvious, our understanding of how these twin dynamics interact remains weak. It is important to highlight that not only does globalization impact the environment, but the environment impacts the pace, direction and quality of globalization.

Economic and ecological concerns are not necessarily in opposition. For example, policies that conserve the quality of agricultural land and protect forests improve the long-term prospects for agricultural development. An increase in the efficiency of energy and material use serves ecological purposes but can also reduce costs. But the compatibility of environmental and economic objectives is often lost in the pursuit of individual or group gains, with little regard for the impacts on others and ignoring the distant consequences of today's decisions on posterity.

Three key security environment challenges today are water scarcity, food shortages and disrupted access to strategic minerals such as oil. Historically, these have been the cause of violence and war. International experience with the linkage between natural resources and conflict calls for resolute action as natural resources can fuel and motivate violent conflict. Conflict sets back the prospects for sustainable development, often by decades, by setting in motion a negative spiral

environmental degradation leads to more competition for scarce resources, leading the powerful to secure the resources for their use, leading to conflict, which leads to worsened social relations, smash-and-grab resource use, greater resentment, etc. Security from national to human is, therefore, a prerequisite for realizing the benefits of sustainable development as well as those of globalization.

Technology has been one of the great drivers of modern globalization. It has also become one of the principal drivers of environmental processes. Transport technologies, for example, have not only made the world a smaller and more “global” planet, they have also resulted in new environmental stress, especially through increased atmospheric carbon concentrations. Technology has sped up prosperity for many, but it has also allowed extraction of resources like fish, timber, metals, minerals, etc., at unprecedented rates, thereby placing new and massive pressures on supply. At the same time, technological advances have allowed, in some areas, reduced environmental stress. China has been able to bring about economic growth by using such technologies with lesser emissions than what Europe and North America were using at similar stages in their development. Their fuel economy standards are also higher than those of the United States. Although its emission rates per GDP are still high, they are decreasing and have been halved in the last few years. Technological solutions will inevitably determine the future of globalization as well as the global environment. Technology cannot change the demands or help us satisfy all of them but it can definitely through globalization, help meet these demands in a more planet friendly way.

Problems in the economy, environment, and society are interrelated and are subject to becoming global in context (Gibson 2002). Anticipated change in one aspect of life, such as increased personal income, might affect changes in other aspects, such as the demand for food and other resources, type of housing, types of travel between home and work, and so on. Thus, planning to intervene in the operation of an isolated sector might be effective but cause undesirable results to other sectors. For example, life expectancy is affected by water, sanitation, and health care. But improving sanitation and access to clean water and reducing infant mortality might increase the population of the hungry and discontented unless the ability to provide more food and better housing is increased proportionately. The objective of sustainability should be focused upon specific interventions as the proportional effect among all system elements.

The world’s resources are limited and threatened by pollution and consumption patterns all over the world. Pollution does not respect national boundaries, but is rapidly spreading its effects

from one country or region to another. The critical condition of the physical environment demands a more holistic approach. The degradation of the natural environment calls for effective multilateral cooperation and policy measures which humanity needs to work on together. Globalization and Environment sustainability though sounds incompatible can co exist if certain measures are considered and the link between them is re-examined and recognized.

- Sustainability efforts and investments should be focused on regions and cities where the population is booming and development needs are highest.
- Reframe social and environmental issues not just as risks, but also as sizeable market opportunities.
- In a world where the rate of change is accelerating, we must build flexibility into technology platforms, supply chains, and human-resource policies.

It is noticed that in the recent years although discussions of environment and globalization have gained much importance and the discussions often take place at the global level yet the implications of these dynamics are invariably national and local. In order to benefit from the potential of globalization and to minimize the threats of environmental degradation, what it all requires is preparedness, information and capacity. Investments in these areas, particularly in developing countries have great potential to bring economic prosperity to the poor. However, this potential cannot be realized until and unless communities and societies work together in unison to actualize these benefits. As such, today's interlinked global economic systems demand an integrated approach in order to foster responsible long term improvement while ensuring that no nation or community is left behind. Economically viable solutions must be developed to conserving natural resources and the environment by reducing resource consumption, stop pollution, and conserve natural habitats. Further in order to meet the requirement of food, shelter, education, energy, health care, jobs, water and sanitation, the world community must also ensure that the rich fabric of cultural and social diversity, and the rights of workers, is respected and that all members of society are empowered to play a role in determining their futures.

### **Globalization and Global Governance**

The world is increasingly interdependent in many ways – socially, economically and environmentally and that is what globalization support. As the world becomes more globalized, more and more people are beginning to abuse the environment and fall out of touch with their relationship with it. However, global economic integration without a concerted attempt to avoid possible negative

social and environmental outcomes has captured the serious attention of national governments and international organizations, especially in light of increasing globalization. Overconcentration of industries, technology transfer, global economic integration, etc. may have both positive and negative effects. That is the reason why sustainability in products, processes, and services has been increasingly emphasized by placing environment at the centre of some industrial transformations -- or at least on a par with competitiveness. The best prospects for maximizing positive effects and minimizing negative effects lie in seeking through global-scale minimum environmental and social standards thus lessening global economic competition on this basis.

The effects of globalization on sustainability cannot be solved by individual actors of global governance, but require effective partnerships. The challenges cannot be solved by single actors alone, neither public nor private ones. The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, as the most mentioned ecological challenge, do not stop at national borders; neither can inflation or unemployment in interdependent markets be controlled by one State alone.

It takes long to ratify international agreements, but they are of no use if they are not implemented and if failure to do so is not sanctioned. Many good initiatives fail within the global governance, even when agreements were made. The Universal Human Rights Declaration is a classic example of an instrument to solve a global challenge, but it remains without effect in many states, because effective mechanisms of implementation and sanctions are missing. Also, the Kyoto Protocol which was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005 was ratified by many States. But not all of them will adhere to the agreements or are against binding agreements on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

This calls for a growing demand and need for global regulation, especially for the means to enforce existing agreements and build upon their synergies to improve environmental performance. The nature of environmental challenges requires the incorporation of environmental governance into other areas (e.g., trade, investment, health, labour, etc.).

Globalization facilitates the involvement of a growing diversity of participants and their coalitions in addressing environmental threats, including market and civil society actors. Stakeholder participation in global environmental governance especially the participation of NGOs and civil society has become a model for other areas of global governance. Further, countries can take measures to strengthen domestic political commitment to sustainable development goals by introducing the concept of sustainable development at all levels of national educational systems, widely publicizing national sustainable development goals and indicators of progress or setbacks in

relation to them; giving national sustainable development goals greater weight in the public consciousness, etc,

What is required at this juncture is the integration of economic and ecological factors into the law and into decision making systems within countries has to be matched at the international level. The growth in fuel and material use dictates that direct physical linkages between ecosystems of different countries will increase. Economic interactions through trade, finance, investment, and travel will also grow and heighten economic and ecological interdependence. Hence in the future, even more so than now, sustainable development requires the unification of economics and ecology in international relations.

### **Conclusion**

What is observed today is that despite ambitious conferences and international forums (e.g. the G20), there has been no significant progress in the field of green growth. What is required at this juncture when global resources are getting depleted is that environmental protection needs to be linked more strongly with sustainable development, biodiversity and water management. The benefits of conserving natural resources need to be further secured and aligned with internationally accepted legal norms and the transition to low-carbon economies needs to be accelerated. In this respect, environmentally responsible economies can work towards global prosperity by deeper and broader equality regarding access to wealth. This in turn would help them to deal more effectively with poverty and unemployment by creating sustainable jobs in a business-friendly environment.

Sustainable development is a vision and a way of acting and reacting in such a way so that we can secure the environment and depleting resources for posterity. Merely bringing about policies will not bring about sustainable development. It needs to be implemented too and stakeholders and civil society can definitely work on it. It principally needs community knowledge and support, which entails greater public participation in the decisions that affect the environment. Quite often, the enforcement of common interest often suffers because areas of political jurisdiction and areas of impact do not coincide. Energy policies in one jurisdiction cause acid precipitation in another. The fishing policies of one state affect the fish catch of another. Hence, no supranational authority exists to resolve such issues. It cannot be addressed from a single perspective, country or scientific discipline and the common interest can only be articulated through international cooperation. Hence in the future, even more so than now, sustainable development requires the unification of economics and ecology in international relations. Planning for sustainable development requires new paradigms and sustainability innovative methods, balancing the short term and long term, the

quantitative and qualitative, the certain and uncertain, etc. Economic freedom, social justice and environment protection can go hand in hand only when it is worked out globally and not considered as a sole responsibility of the environmental community or one nation.

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