WHICH GLOBALIZATION? OPENING SPACES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The computer, the telecommunications revolution and the power of the electronic media have made the world a global village. What have been some of the principal features of this new globalization?

One of the most significant developments is that, as the Global Age has become a reality the nation-state has retreated. In the general restructuring that has taken place across the globe, governments have become smaller, their roles have become more circumscribed, their involvement in the economy less pronounced – and in some instances non-existent, so much so that the role of the government has now been redefined as facilitator, enabler, monitor and referee.

The second vital element of globalization is the growth and expansion of international trade in an era of open economies as legitimate business activity intensified and internationalized to take into account the borderless global market space. Against this background, several countries adopted a strategy which came to be described as a strategy of export-led growth.

A third significant but disastrous factor in globalization has been that the other side of business growth and expansion such as organized criminal activity including trafficking in guns and drugs have evolved into a transnational network. This situation has been complicated by the involvement of international networks in both legitimate and illegal businesses.

At another level, deeper understanding of ecology and ecological systems has led to an integrated, planetary perspective on environmental issues and this in turn has facilitated the emergence of the concept of sustainability in the development paradigm. With every passing day, the sustainable development approach seems to become more influential.

Finally, everywhere, ordinary people in their own right as well as in their organizations (NGOs) are insisting on having their voice heard in their own communities and are connecting with each other across the globe. This phenomenon has come to be described as the rise of civil

society. As Jessica Matthews points out; "Except in China, Japan, the Middle East and a few other places where culture or authoritarian governments severely limit civil society, NGO's role and influence have exploded in the last half decade" (Matthews, 1997:53).

Sustainable Approach to the Development of People

This article focuses on the role of people and peoples' organizations in the development process and takes a sustainable development approach to the building of society. This article also takes a stakeholder approach to the process of political participation. So far, the traditional approaches to development have not placed people at the center nor have the sustainability issues been much emphasized. This is certainly true when one takes into account the structural adjustment policies initiated in the Caribbean and Latin American region in the 1980s. In addition, traditionally government, business, trade unions and peoples organizations have often been at odds with each other on policy issues and one of the burning needs has been how to generate consensus at the national level. We view civic engagement, therefore, as a mechanism for conflict resolution, cooperation and consensus-building.

II. STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

During the period of structural adjustment when strategies focused on reducing the size and role of the state and while economic liberalization policies focused on the growth and expansion of competitive businesses, the private sector emerged as the engine of economic growth in almost every country in the Caribbean and Latin America. However, such growth did not seem to impact significantly on improvement of the human condition and it was not long before jobless growth became an area of concern, not only in the Caribbean and Latin America but across the globe.[1]

In 1994, per capita income rose by 1.7% in Sweden, productivity by 1.5% but employment only by 0.5%. In Trinidad and Tobago, the GDP grew by 4.6% in 1994 but employment increased only by 1.4%. The situation is the same in countries such as India where between 1975 and 1989, the GDP grew by 5% while annual employment creation grew by approximately 2%. A similar situation exists in Gambia and Egypt. In all of these cases, income and productivity growth benefited only those lucky enough to be employed while disparities between the employed and the unemployed widened (Bruno, Ravallion and Squire, 1996).

In small island developing states, structural adjustment reforms have been followed by increasing levels of poverty, high unemployment, an

escalating crime rate; sometimes an entrenched drug culture, and often crises in health care and failing education systems (IDB Report, 1996).

It is not unreasonable to claim that structural adjustment coupled with economic liberalization policies which have been a formidable arsenal in the globalization process have reduced the role of government, increased the role of the business sector and have had the unintended consequence of placing an inordinate burden on the ordinary citizen. This is what has led some commentators to conclude that the new globalization is inherently inequitable.

The socioeconomic characteristics of small island developing states, such as we have in the Caribbean region, have always made them particularly vulnerable to external forces and these "vulnerabilities" have now been magnified by the phenomenon of globalization. It is the emergence of such realities which have elicited challenges to the concept of the level playing field and which have prompted the cry in favor of growth with equity.[2]

III. REALIGNMENT AND COLLABORATIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The impact which globalization has had on regional economies has led to the realization that a mutually supportive relationship between private and public sectors is fundamental to the economic growth process and this is reinforced by a survey of the private sector in eight countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay) conducted by the World Bank (Holden and Rajapatirana, 1995). This particular survey addressed issues such as, conducting business to government relations as well as business to business transactions. It also focused on private sector perceptions of the factors which slow business expansion. In all instances, the respondents stressed the importance of the macroeconomic environment. There was also the pervasive perception that macroeconomic stability was closely related to political stability.

Against this background, a statement by the head of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce is instructive: "Business cannot prosper in an unstable and impoverished society nor can it ignore the consequences of environmental degradation ... Corporate and Executive vision must be enlarged to accommodate the social and civic dons which must be factored into economic activity and goals" (Deane, 1997).

If the reform process has produced a realignment in the traditional role ascribed to both public and private sector, it has also prompted a more collaborative approach between government and business to meet the challenges of sustainable development in the new global order.

In some countries, this has also spread to include the trade union movement as well as NGOs. Collaboration among the various actors has led to the inclusion of trade union and NGO representatives on state boards, in consultative forums and in national negotiation teams involved in international negotiations of various kinds. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that government is still in the driver's seat, as far as these initiatives are concerned. This kind of collaborative approach to development issues and challenges demonstrates a growing recognition on the part of government of the need for civic engagement.

Civic engagement has always been an important area of concern in the context of development. In most countries, there is a rich tradition of community action as a force for change in both urban and rural contexts. Today, civic engagement is described in a number of ways. Whether one describes the phenomenon as community building, civic institutions, social capital, citizens' organizations, non-government or civic engagement – the concern is really about two things: peoples' participation in the socioeconomic and political process and the social infrastructure required to support the democratic decision-making process.

One commentator, writing on activities in the 1970s and 1980s, has pointed out; "it was really the government ... that set down the requirements for participation in the community development process. Tensions between the centers of power and the edges of society soon appeared."(Lotz, 1987:42)

The scenario today, however, is somewhat different. As government budgets shrink and the empowerment of peoples' institutions grow, the context and framework for community building has undergone significant change. Within national boundaries, the reduced role of government coupled with the outward look of business have opened up the space available for non-government, non-business intervention and action. Across national boundaries, people-to-people networks have even created cyber communities based on a range of varied interests, from the environment to gender equity. To a significant degree, therefore, there has been a power shift away from government.

IV. THE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

With globalization, the sustainable approach to development is being accepted more and more as the only rational and reasonable approach to the dilemma of development in an interdependent interconnected world. Moreover, if the world is interdependent and interconnected: what is the implication for entities within a society or nation?

The sustainable development approach is, of course, heavily influenced by ecological and environmental concerns but this approach is also concerned with historical resources, cultural preservation and sociocultural principles.

Consequently, the view of a sustainable society is one in which the well-being of individuals and communities is of paramount importance. Included here is the idea of equity and social justice, respect for the dignity of every human being and the right of communities to maintain their cultural autonomy and integrity.

Included in this concept too, is the idea of participation and inclusion. The objective of such considerations is to take into account the distributional impacts within society, between regions and across generations. It is not far fetched to claim that from the sustainable development viewpoint society consists of a variety of stakeholders who share a common present and who can help to create a common future through cooperative endeavor.[3]

If the development challenge is about the growth and development of people and the development of sustainable systems, should development then be left to governments and policy makers alone? Or should a new development paradigm facilitate the participation and engagement of stakeholders (variously defined) in charting the course of development and ensuring effective implementation of plans of action which derive from development policy?

These are fundamental questions which have to do with the premise of democracy itself. They are also the kinds of questions which one needs to explore if civic engagement is to grow as the forces of globalization intensify in our current context. They are also critical if development is to have any relevance to the ordinary citizen. At the heart of the challenge of "civic engagements," therefore, is the dilemma of determining the framework for the development paradigm which we wish to actively pursue. It is this kind of thinking which has been prompting peoples' organizations of various kinds to seek out spaces for civic involvement across the globe.

If we are to take a sustainable development approach to Caribbean society, then the ordinary citizen and the organizations in which they assemble must play a pivotal role in the development process. Part of the role that such organizations and institutions must play involves embracing responsibility for the social, ecological and economic sustainability of the societies in which they live.

As far back as 1990, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) had this to say about human development: "People must be at the

center of human development – as the agents and beneficiaries of the development process. People's needs and interests should guide the direction of development, and should be fully involved in propelling economic growth and social progress" (UNDP Report, 1990). Unless the Caribbean can create the conditions for increased social involvement and greater economic participation, the political stability of the region may well be in jeopardy. The tragedy of countries which have been torn apart by conflicts of one kind or another remain brutal reminders of the cost of not facilitating the evolution of civil society.

V. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The facilitation of public participation has long been held as a global "best practice" strategy in the implementation of effective development activities. Participatory development has long been understood as a process through which stakeholders wield influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources. A number of rationales have been offered for the adoption of a participatory approach to decision-making. These include the following:

- as a means of ensuring a fair distribution of cost and benefits, affected parties need an opportunity to articulate their self interest;
- involvement of affected parties can enhance the quality of information available to decision makers;
- early and meaningful involvement can enhance the potential for support of decisions;
- the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect one's destiny is a key element of self-empowerment and self-actualization.[4]

The extent to which the participatory process is seen as a sine qua non for sustainable development initiatives, can be gleaned from the fact that, in major forums involving strategic initiatives on a global or regional basis, participation by multiple stakeholders in society is seen as a key ingredient for the success of any project or for the achievement of objectives. In the 1990s, a stakeholder approach to public participation is emphasized. The following are worthy of note:

- multilateral lending agencies (World Bank, United Nations Development Programs, European Community, the Inter-American Development Bank) require environmental and social impact studies utilizing popular participation methodologies for all development projects.
- citizen involvement and the search for consensus in planning and implementing sustainable development are among the key points made most frequently in the Declaration of Rio and Agenda 21 (UNCED,

1992). For example, Section I Chapter 8 of Agenda 21 calls upon governments to seek broader public participation in decision and policy making for sustainable development; and Section III is devoted to strengthening the role played by the principal social groups: women, children and young people, indigenous populations and the establishment of relations with NGOs, local government bodies, workers' associations and unions, business and industry and the scientific and technological community.

- The Barbados Declaration of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (1994) maintains that the implementation of Agenda 21 and its Plan of Action is contingent on the establishment of partnerships between governments, intergovernmental organizations and agencies, non-governmental organizations and other groups;

- The Plan of Action adopted at the Summit of the Americas (April 1996) distinctly calls for "the participation of all elements of our civil society" in implementing the Plan of Action which contains twenty-three initiatives grouped under four (4) general headings: Strengthening Democracy, Economic Integration and Free Trade, Poverty Eradication and Discrimination, Promoting Sustainable Development Strategies to Preserve the Natural Environment.

- In 1996, the Bolivian Summit on Sustainable Development Strategies sought to concretize specific mechanisms to facilitate decision making for sustainable development. The primary initiative considered was the formulation and implementation of an "Inter-American strategy for the Promotion of Citizen Participation in Decision-Making for Sustainable Development."

There seems to be, therefore, region-wide agreement that increased participation by all sectors of the society is necessary if the countries of the Western Hemisphere are to engage in sustainable development strategies. However, the effectiveness of the strategy to date remains questionable.

What seems clear is that governments are now fully convinced that no major national, regional or international initiatives can succeed without the inclusion and involvement of the people. What is equally clear is that multilateral agencies are also strongly supportive of a stakeholder approach to sustainable development which facilitates the involvement and participation of people and currently multilateral agencies are paying a great deal of attention to the management of the process of participation. This now includes social assessments which identify constituent social groups, the leadership hierarchy, interrelationships and their value and capabilities. The intention here is to facilitate more rather than less participation so that by all groups whose interest in and influence on the outcome can be critical.

This is how one agency views the management of the process of participation and civic engagement in fundamental societal and development issues: "In general terms, this means a need to make room for the creation of a citizenry who feel that they own the public policy arena, that they are accountable for the failure or success of society, that government is their instrument and collaborator, not an obstacle or master. Such an arrangement must enable various groups with their different and even conflicting priorities to reach a consensus that, even if not totally satisfactory to each one, will be accepted by all. The people should be able to communicate with their government responsibly and constructively, and acknowledge its obligation and mandate to serve the interests of the public" (UNDP Report, 1990).

Clearly, the relationship between government and people in all societies is undergoing a major transformation. In the post structural adjustment period, therefore, it would seem that the climate is especially conducive to civic engagement in the development process. Several factors are coalescing to create this supportive climate such as the fact that the private sector is now in the driver's seat; the fact that governments are operating under severe budgetary constraints, and that their power and influence have also been reduced; the fact that people in general are demanding everywhere that they be heard and that they be taken into account; the fact that civil society is generally on the rise, the recognition that the development process has hitherto largely ignored the peoples' interest; the fact that sustainable approaches to development is more comprehensive and integrative; and the fact that a stakeholder approach to public participation is gaining in currency.

The realignment of roles therefore continues. While the business sector has become the engine of growth and the state relegated to the role of facilitator of private sector initiatives; in the social sector service delivery is being surrendered by the state to non-governmental organizations which are perceived to be not only more efficient and effective but also more caring and humane.

VI. EVALUATION AND PARTICIPATORY PROCESS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Generally speaking, the participatory approach has been facilitated by several strategies in Trinidad and Tobago. These include mass mobilization, social action, citizen participation, public advocacy and popular education. Of these, citizen participation and popular education have been to a large extent institutionalized. Government agencies have sought to involve citizens in policy planning and program implementation

in a variety of ways. These have included workshops, public consultations, public requests for comments, and field visits to affected communities.

The extent of efforts to facilitate participation have varied over the past fifteen years from little to no consultation, followed by focus group consultation where relevant agencies as determined by government, would be invited to workshops to consider a prepared policy document and make contributions from their particular perspective. Within the last two to three years however, the approach has been to encourage national consultations where any member of the public could contribute to a specific issue (economic / political / social / legislative) if they so desired.

In spite of the various efforts to allow participation of a broad cross section of the community in policy planning and implementation, it is instructive that involvement in the process is usually at the stage when the policy document is being finalized. The fact that stakeholder participation is not encouraged at the preliminary stages of policy development often suggests to relevant stakeholders that their perceptions or priorities do not warrant consideration.

The general perception that specific policy documents offered for comment are basically a *fait accompli* is reinforced by the fact that more often than not:

- There is doubt as to whether contributions by pertinent stakeholders are seriously considered after the consultation is over.
- There is a pervasive public perception that interests of influential advocates (political economic influence) are more likely to be considered by those in authority.
- Participatory approach is often perceived merely as "window dressing".

As such, a "culture of disbelief" pervades the entire process and in fact studies (World Bank, 1992) have shown that presentation of a "final" document for public comment is the least constructive approach for eliciting public contribution.

It has been suggested by some theorists that this approach is in fact used by government agencies "to provide public relations for agency plans, or to diffuse antagonism of protest groups, or to legitimize decisions made elsewhere."(Ibid.).

In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, this assertion is difficult to refute or uphold simply because it would require an ex ante and ex post analysis of specific policies presented for public comment (Health Sector Reform Policy, Education Policy Paper, Public Sector Reform etc.) However, the fact that one cannot say with any degree of accuracy that public contributions are normally incorporated suggests that a mechanism

must be developed to inform stakeholders of such amendments as have been made to policy or to provide a justification for the lack of change in the document as proposed. Moreover, participation should be encouraged at every stage of the development process - conception/ design/ preparation/ implementation.

This approach becomes all the more critical as society steps forward into the future. Some commentators looking into the future suggest those formal contractual relationships between the state and individuals will be de-emphasized. They suggest that will be emphasized is the idea of community. They write about such emerging trends as "self-reliance, inter-community information networks, freely committed volunteerism and a people centered vision of development" (Robinson, 1995:22).

To ensure that such a strategy is workable, several questions (Partridge, 1994) need to be answered and ground rules need to be laid. For instance:

- Who are the relevant stakeholders?
- What are the customary institutional forms of decision making in the country in question?
- What are the customary forms of communication preceding decision-making?

The answers to these questions need to be considered in the context of the need for increased participation on the one hand balanced by the need for technical competence on the other. Purely technical decisions would not require a major input from the public at large. There are, however, some decisions which require the specific inputs of affected social groups. There are others which require clear policy direction from government. Finally, there are decisions which one might prefer to leave to the market and as the forces play some consensual position may emerge. Even when the process is left to the market, this process can only be credible if each stakeholder is convinced of the authenticity of the process. It needs to be informed by "the realization that each stakeholder must be free to enter agreements that create value for themselves and solidarity is realized by the mutuality of stakeholder interests" (Nasi, 1995).

In his book *Understanding Stakeholder Thinking,* Juha Nasi emphasizes the value of the credibility of process and proposes three fundamental ground rules to facilitate the effective functioning of a stakeholder approach:

- The Stakeholder Enabling Principle: Countries shall be managed in the interest of its stakeholders, defined as private sector, labor unions, non-governmental organizations / community groups, individuals.
- The Principle of Director Responsibility: Leaders of Government shall have a duty of care and use reasonable judgement to define and direct the affairs of the country in accordance with the Stakeholder Enabling Principle.
- The Principle of Stakeholder Recourse: Stakeholders may bring an action against the government for failure to perform the required duty of care (ensuring accountability to the stakeholders).

These ground rules seem to be reasonable as well as functional and are worth noting by those who have an interest in shaping the democratic process.

Managing a stakeholder strategy can be something of a nightmare, especially when one takes into consideration that in Trinidad and Tobago alone (with a population of 1.3 million) there are four hundred and fifty four (454) non-governmental organizations registered with the Ministry of Social Development and that there are possibly at least about that number that are not accounted for in the register of the Social Development Ministry.

One of our assumptions in discerning civil society in the context of national governments and against the background of globalization has been that "a strong and active civil society" is vital "to the consolidation of democracy" (Putnam, 1993). Putnam also argues that "successful outcomes are more likely in civically engaged societies." The institutions of civil society constitute those entities that are more and more being regarded as "social capital" and as creators of social capital. As Putnam has argued in the simplest of statements, "Working together is easier in a community blessed with social capital." Robert Wuthnow (1996) of Princeton University takes the view that "one of the ways to renew civil society may be to understand better the conditions that facilitate trust and the one that erode it."[5] Trust therefore lubricates social capital, and social capital makes democracies work better

From a Caribbean perspective, an understanding of how social capital is created and how its growth can be facilitated is a matter of great interest. The Caribbean needs desperately to concentrate on building social capital because civic engagement can create democratic institutions and expand the democratic process. In order to do this, ground rules need to be clearly established so that trust can be built. For this, progressive governments are needed, in which the leaders understand and appreciate the value of genuine peoples' participation. It is important also that

Caribbean governments take into account the fact that that while participation may be local, the thrust as well as the aspirations of local communities may be heavily influenced by what is taking place globally. National communities could well become dysfunctional when global trends, community interest and governmental policies collide.

Earlier in the article, I alluded to the existence of cyber communities. This only points to the changing nature of the community concept. Therefore, civic organizations themselves are undergoing a transformation caught as they are between local concerns and global influences since a community of interest may be transnational in nature.

Powerful NGOs are building constituencies of their own throughout the globe and influencing international agendas and if they are influencing international agendas, they are also influencing national agendas by working through local NGOs. Fed by international organizations, local NGOs in specialist areas often have more knowledge and information than governments on particular subjects. Armed with such information and knowledge, in consultative forums they are certain to have significant influence.

It does not seem likely that, in a world where knowledge is driving everything, consultation with NGOs will become a necessity simply to access information of a special nature. This is especially true in small, relatively underdeveloped societies. Once NGOs become major sources of information they will first influence national policy and it seems that it would then be merely a matter of time before they will be co-opted by government to help frame it. This is already happening at the national level in certain countries and certainly at the international level. The Environmental Lobby and the Rio Conference for instance.

In the age of globalization, well connected and buttressed by information and knowledge, local NGOs specializing in particular areas of interest are likely to be extremely influential on civil society institutions and on the citizenry at large. This will make them a formidable force in small societies and increase their influence on national policy. This will occur both through their direct influence on government and their increasing influence on other social institutions.

Notes

1   In 1995, rising unemployment was a reason for concern. For a group of 17 countries representing more than 90% of the region's GDP and population, the unemployment rate rose from 6.6% to 7.8%, the largest rise since 1983. IBD, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America,* 1996 Report.

2   Ross, Birsdall and Sabot (1995); Psacharoupoulous and Fiszbein (1995); IADB and UNDP (1993).

3   For a thorough introduction to the Sustainable Development perspective see World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), *Our Common Future.* Oxford University Press.

4   International Institute for Sustainable Development "Core Sustainable Development Principles. 1.2.4 Participation".

5   The Role of Trust in Civic Renewal, Working Paper 1 of the National Commission on Civic Renewal.

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