

GLOBALIZATION: WHEN EVERYTHING IS FOR SALE

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Social Issues in a Piece of Fish

Have you ever wondered how fish arrives at your dining table? Imagine a fisherman catching fish at night, selling his catch at the local market the next day – this scenario is quite correct if you live in a town near a fishing village. But for a city dweller, it is likely that the fish has traveled great distances to get to your table

I remember a visit I made to General Santos fishing village some years ago. As I approached the village in early dawn, I saw several dozen small fishing boats returning from sea; several middlemen and some women holding cell phones waiting by the shore. When the fishing boats were unloaded, large tunas were spread side by side on a long makeshift table and immediately, negotiations for prices started as middlemen and women spoke through cell phones with dealers in Japan. Fresh tuna is a favorite source of sashimi, much in demand in restaurants in Japan. Imagine this daily scenario repeated in many fishing villages in the Philippines.

Parallel to this “free market” haggling is a grim reality that millions of fisherfolk cannot even afford to bring fish to their own dinner table. Local fisherfolks have cried foul against trade liberalization. Trade liberalization threatens their livelihood, way of life, and in the end their very existence.

Since the beginning of the industrial era, human “progress” has envisioned “development” in very specific ways. This vision relies on the belief that economic growth especially via the “free-market” system is central to development; that wealth will “trickle down” to all citizens; and furthermore, the North can help the South catch up through aid, trade, investments and global economic integration. In recent years, these economic “dogmas” have been boosted by the forces of globalization controlled by the powerful nation-states, transnational corporations and international agencies or regimes (e.g. IMF, World Bank, WTO, APEC, NAFTA).

Yet, voices of ordinary peoples worldwide have made counterclaims that such modernization and globalization have, in fact, accentuated structural violence against the poor majorities.

The environmental movement recognizes that the issues involve institutional and collective power relations between those who “get rich on nature” and those who bear the brunt of “nature’s revenge”. Large scale mining operations, mineral extraction, chemical farming, mechanized fishing, megadams – all these activities continue to appropriate resources from the forests, mountains, croplands, and the seas while displacing millions of people, particularly the Indigenous Peoples worldwide. All these activities are driven by many South government’s export orientation in compliance with structural adjustment measures imposed by the WB and IMF on the government’s economic agenda.

The politics of production resulting in environmental change involve powerful national and transnational institutions. Policies and practices of these institutions affect destinies of lands, rivers, and peoples. Changes made on the environment - whether human-designed or by nature – result in consequences that either challenge or reinforce existing social arrangements.

Regrettably, our tendency to reduce the issue of environment to cultural ecology or human ecology limits our analysis of the problem. We overlook the real issue of power politics and its impact on marginalized peoples. In the process of environmental change, some people suffer more than others - some even get killed - not all are equally exposed to danger. Although environmental discourse can sound universal, the impact is most often very much local. So is the impact of power-laden practices and policies very much political

Hence there is a need to “face the power relations involved in the alteration of the environment”. At the heart of this concern is the way environmental change impacts on the socioeconomic life and political processes of the people, especially the poor. What happens when, as a result of various global, national, and local actions, the environment is altered? It is important to look at both episodic change and everyday change. Episodic change refers to massive flooding, drought, and similar

disasters. Everyday change includes erosion, salinization, deforestation, and pollution. Both processes result in the marginality of the land and its people.

Since not all people are equally exposed to these effects, a crucial question to ask is - how is existing inequality challenged or reinforced? To fully appreciate the impact of this process, it is important to remind ourselves that land is multidimensional in meaning and valuation. Land is a political territory, an economic resource and a cultural and spiritual base for many people. Marginalization from the land therefore means more than location transfer. Those displaced due to environmental changes (e.g., deforestation and construction of big dams) may feel that their whole way of life is being taken away from them. This is particularly applicable to upland dwelling Indigenous peoples who have a life-line attachment to land.

On dam-building

In a 400-page report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD for short) titled *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision Making*, or "the WCD Report," the activity (or complicity) of the World Bank in worldwide construction of megadams describes the World Bank as the largest single source of funds for large dam construction worldwide - it has promoted and funded dams that have displaced more than 10 million people from their homes and land; caused severe environmental damage; and pushed borrowers further into debt

The World Commission on Dams (WCD) estimates that the Bank has provided almost \$75 billion (in 1998) for 538 large dams in 92 countries, including many of the world's largest and most controversial projects. Several examples are:

Ilisu Hydroelectric Power Project on the Tigris River, Turkey

- the dam will flood more than 90 villages and the ancient town of Hasankeyf, and affect up to 78,000 people, mainly ethnic Kurds and "will destroy Kurdish history and culture"

Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP)

- Africa's largest infrastructure project—a massive, multi-dam scheme built to divert water from Lesotho's Maloti Mountains to South Africa's industrial Gauteng Province
- when completed the dam will dispossess more than 30,000 rural farmers of assets (including homes, fields, and grazing lands) and deprive many of their livelihoods.

Nam Theun 2 Dam, Theun River, Laos

- the \$1.2 billion dollar hydropower project planned for Laos
- almost all of the dam's 1,060 MW of generating capacity would be exported to Thailand
- the project would flood approximately 450 square kilometers of the Nakai Plateau, an area of rich biological diversity
- approximately 4,500 people will be resettled by the project; a much greater number of families will be affected by the dam's construction without being directly displaced
- thousands more people living upstream along the Nam Theun, and along the Mekong between the confluence of the Nam Kading and Xe Bang Fai rivers, may also be affected

Narmada River Dams, India

SARDAR SAROVAR PROJECT

- about 200,000 people would be displaced for the reservoir; hundreds of thousands more will lose land or livelihood due to related developments
- faced with these future prospects, villagers have vowed to remain on their lands and face submergence behind the partly-built dam rather than face a life of certain destitution.

Three Gorges Dam, Yangtze River, China

- If completed, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze will be the largest hydroelectric dam in the world, Its reservoir would be over 600 kilometers long and force the displacement of as many as 1.9 million people
- Up to 1.9 million people will be displaced and resettlement on this scale is impossible
- Not only are communities destroyed, but the cities and towns that are forced to absorb the migrants face economic and social upheaval.

On Mining

In the mining industry, trade liberalization has aggravated the existing exploitative and oppressive conditions in the industry and also magnified the environmental destruction in the countryside. For example, the liberalized entry of foreign mining companies in many South countries has intensified the dislocation of thousands of communities, the conflict over land ownership, and the poisoning of surrounding communities due to mine tailings.

In the Philippines, the struggle of communities against globalization of Philippine mining has gained international support exemplified in the case against Marcopper, a mining company in the Philippines owned by a Canadian firm Placer Dome until it divested itself in 1997.

Charges of pollution were first hurled in 1986 against Marcopper by the people of Marinduque. To this day Placer Dome refuses to admit responsibility for the worst mining disaster in Philippine history and among the most widely reported in the industry.

More than three million tons of mine tailings flowed into the river when Marcopper's badly-sealed drainage tunnel broke. For over a decade Marcopper was dumping its mine tailings into the Bay until people power forced the government to order Marcopper to stop in 1986.

Placer Dome remains adamant that the tailings pose no hazard to the environment or the inhabitants around the bay.

On Logging

Large-scale logging for decades had led to the balding of the hills and swelling of the rivers the whole-year round in many heavily indebted countries in the South. Examples are:

- The holocaust of the green cathedral – description of the tropical deforestation in the amazon
- Ethiopia's forests facing extinction
- Logging, multinationals and the Asian invasion of the Amazon
- The burning of Indonesia: An ecological catastrophe

- The Carbon bomb: Climate change and the Northern Boreal Forests

As one can see, in case after case the benefits have been far less than promised or projected in the development planners' blueprint, and the costs – in terms of money spent, debts incurred, communities uprooted, fisheries and forests destroyed, and opportunities lost – have been far greater than imagined.

But all these activities are seen in the “globalization from above” paradigm as signs of progress and development.

Which raises the whole question of development.

For us in the South, especially the Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups like farmers, fisherfolk, peasants, and labourers, another meaning of development is more familiar – we call it “development aggression”

For example, logs taken from Indigenous peoples ancestral lands symbolize different things to different people:

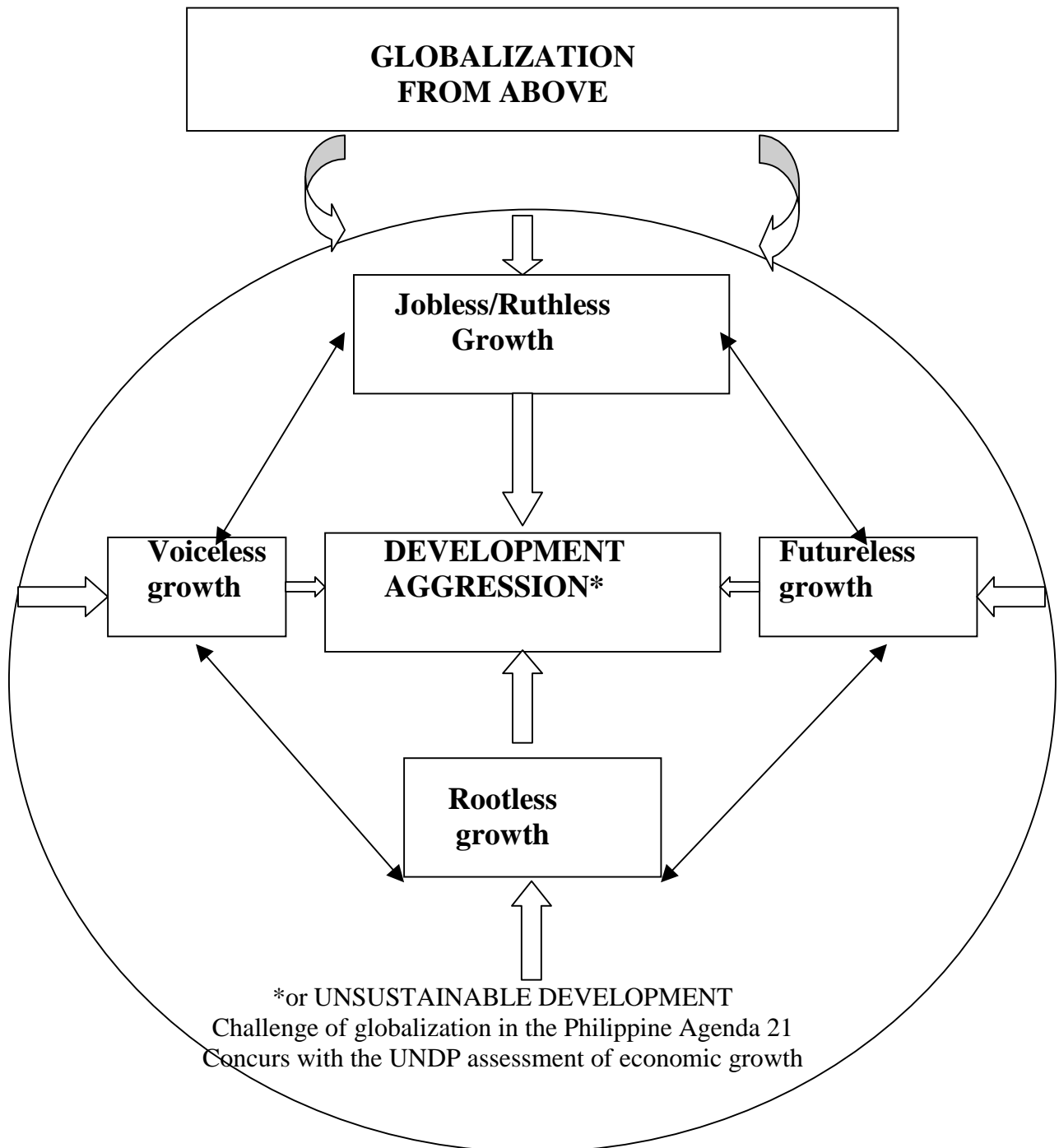
- To the TNCs, it means profit, progress, and development
- To the environmentalist, it means the destruction of the environment
- To the Indigenous person, it means loss of their home and lifeforce

Huge dams represent many different things to different people:

- To the TNCs, it means assured supply of power to drive full scale industrialization
- To the environmentalist, it means irreversible degradation of the environment and loss of biodiversity
- To the Indigenous peoples it means the drowning of a people and all they live for and by.

Why development aggression?

In 1996, the Philippines launched Philippine Agenda 21 which details both opportunities and challenges arising out of the process of globalization. The challenge of globalization is summarized in Figure 1. The figure demonstrates that the Philippine Agenda 21 concurs with the assessment of the United Nations Development Program of the costs and benefits of globalization. According to the UNDP assessment, economic growth also results in the increase of less desirable forms of growth: jobless/ruthless growth; voiceless growth; rootless growth; and futureless growth.



Jobless/ruthless growth

- Poorly planned agro-industrial strategies & growth corridors
- High indebtedness
- One-sided liberalization

Voiceless growth

- Iniquitous political structures
- Corruption
- Lack of political will
- Patronage & political dynasties

Rootless growth

- Erosion of cultural values
- Cultural homogenization
- Unsustainable consumption
- Increased materialism

Futureless growth

- Degradation of the environment
- Bioprospecting
- Biopiracy
- Loss of biodiversity

Conclusion

In a real democracy the people have a voice in running the government. The peoples' voice can be heard through their elected leaders and representatives in Congress or Parliament. But when the elected leaders are completely disconnected from the grassroots, the peoples' voice can also be heard directly from them through their organizations. The right of the people and their organizations to participate at all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making are basic to any democratic state. And it is expected that the State shall provide adequate means of consultation with peoples' organizations.

Through the educational activities of schools, NGOs and POs, citizens can be helped to develop a critical consciousness towards issues which determine their quality of life and their social, economic, political and natural environments.

Citizens can learn to overcome years of uncritical acceptance of "top-down" and "authority-based" knowledge as they ask questions about the root causes of societal problems.

Through a continuing educational process, young people acquire skills for gathering data to answer those questions as objectively as possible, albeit skills which are infused with ethics, reciprocity, and solidarity.

Social movements have also shown that to educate for transformation is to try to catalyze the people to undertake action on the basis of their consciousness and self-realized responsibility. Such action includes both personal or what an individual can do to make her/his personal and interpersonal environment more peaceful, and social or what individuals can do in solidarity with each other as groups, movements, institutions, citizens, and communities.