

Globalization, gender equity and local identity in Nigeria

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Introduction

Globalization is the intensification of worldwide social, economic and cultural relations, causing such a linkage between distant localities to the extent that the physical barriers are so broken down that, whatever happens locally, they are shaped by events occurring hundreds of miles away and vice versa (MONSARAY and AMOSUN, 2002). With globalization, the elements of commonality affected include cooking, dancing, courtship, divination, family, games, government, greetings hospitality, joking, language, law, medicine, music, pregnancy, trade, visiting, education, division of labor, food taboos, funeral rights, property rights, religion, dressing and tool making (MURDOCK, 1955). Globalization also involves the integration of local and national economies into an increasingly interlinked world economy (GUTTA, 2000).

The aim of globalization is to create a global economy, culture and consequently a "global village." It aims at giving every country equal chances of self-development and actualization. The U.N. (2002) report said that in the 1990s, those countries and enterprises that took advantage of globalization and its rapid spread of information and communication technologies, prospered a lot. This was an open invitation to globalization. Thus, theoretically, all countries participating in the globalization innovation are supposed to have positive returns from their participation.

This paper wishes to discuss globalization as it affects

Nigeria, her economy and her womenfolk. It looks at globalization and women in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Nigerian Society and discusses how Nigerian women are faring in this era of globalization.

Globalization and women

The problems of Nigerian women seem to have been compounded with globalization, as the successful utilization of globalization rests on some important pre-conditions which can be very difficult for any developing country to fulfill. For instance, trade and exchange rate liberalization is a major condition of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic reform package, which is usually accepted for "internally distressed and externally indebted" countries in exchange for debt relief. Garba and Garba (1997) said that "if both creditor and debtor are rational and free to make choices that are consistent with their best interest, a debtor-creditor game would neither lead to an unconditional offer of debt relief or the acceptance of unconditional relief." However, if either the debtor or the creditor has the upper hand in the negotiation, and can force the solution, it would be an unequal agreement. In most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the creditors have the upper hand and force solution to their advantage. Thus the debtors, which are mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, become bonded to very subservient conditions. Also, most interest groups in the debtor nations are excluded from the negotiations on the debt repayment agreement. This is the position of countries like Nigeria. It is therefore misleading to assume that it shows their position in global trading (GARBA and GARBA, 1999). As a result of the above situation, a country like Nigeria found herself transferring the benefits of globalization to her trading partners in the form of lower prices.

The result of globalization is a further widening of already existing inequalities between the developed countries and the developing countries, especially in international trade. This is so because it made the Third World lose all the consensus of lower tariffs they had on the entry of their goods into developed countries, as soon as they become members of the union. The implication of this is that developing countries are unable to compete with the richer developed world, who dump cheaper and sometimes sub-standard goods into their markets, thus leading to the death of many industries like the textile industry in Nigeria. This led to the loss of jobs for many Nigerians and heads of households. In a situation like this, women and children bear the brunt of such problems, as what affects women affects children substantially.

Some of the reasons for this include the fact that most societies discriminate against women from birth until death, most

Nigerian cultures discriminate against women, the Christian, Islamic and traditional religions all discriminate against women. Women themselves ignorantly reinforce, accept and even discriminate against themselves and are usually the least prepared to be bread winners, thus they usually end up as petty traders, low wage earners, prostitutes and providers of unskilled labor.

Garba (1997) predicted that with globalization and consequently devaluation in Sub-Saharan Africa (S.S.A.) there is bound to be a wage freeze, rationalization of public employees, commercialization and privatization which negatively affect the growth of skilled and unskilled women employment in all parts of the society. This situation will lead to a shift to subsistence and informal sub-economies, which further widen gender inequities in income distribution. Similarly, privatization also reinforces gender inequities because most women belong to poor households and cannot afford participation. The removal of subsidies from petroleum products – as has happened in Nigeria – has further highlighted the problem of gender inequity in Nigeria, as many Nigerian women are forced to shift from cooking meals with gas cookers and kerosene stoves, which became too expensive, to the use of fire wood and charcoal stoves which is dirtier, harder and more difficult to use.

Series of studies on the effects of globalization and structural adjustment on women in S.S.A. have shown that women have not been able to reap the benefits of globalization in many ways. Some of these studies include those by Beneria and Roldan (1987); Sen and Grown (1987); Elson (1991 and 1995); Akanji (1997); Taiwo (1997); Cagatay and Ozler (1995). They all reveal an increase in reproductive work, feminization of labor force at low income levels; increased bias against female education, deterioration of physical and mental health, disintegration of families, declining education and increased vulnerability of women. These writers came up with a formal model which showed the effects of gender biases on the adjustment of women to globalization. This model shown in the 1995 World Development Report predicts that globalization and economic adjustment would:

- slow down the growth of skilled and semi-skilled women by increasing the bias against the education of the girl child;
- reduce the employment of women in high and stable income sub-economies through privatization, job squeeze and adverse effects of devaluation on domestic production and employment;
- cause shifts to less efficient reproductive technologies in response to low real income and appropriate pricing of cooking gas, kerosene and higher costs of cooking stoves;
- rise in trading constraints leading to more inequitable income and asset distribution and socially inefficient and gender inequity enhancing choices such as the marketing of under-aged girls as house-girls, prostitutes and survival strategies that crowd-out child-care and child welfare;
- economic reform would increase social, economic and environmental constraints on women and hence restrict their feasible choice sets. Adverse welfare effects would result.

By weakening the economic power of women, economic reform will also weaken their political empowerment. Thus "femocracy" remains the most feasible means through which a few women would influence public policy (GARBA and GARBA, 1997; ODEJIDE, 1997; AKANJI, 1997).

The above prediction is already the current situation in Nigeria today. The result of this poverty for the third world is further poverty. One outcome has been massive brain drain in various disciplines, as the underdeveloped economies cannot support them and guarantee them good living standards. Beside this there is extensive corruption and exportation of

national wealth by corrupt leaders to banks in the developed world, which further develops the latter and under-develops the former.

The drive to corruptly amass wealth became stronger because there is neither a known social welfare package nor a reliable pension program for most developing countries. The implication of this is that it makes people desperate to "steal" a lot more than they actually need (now); in preparation for their old age. Besides this, a lot of times, such executive stealing is usually viewed as "smartness," as long as the "thief" is not caught. In such situations, people are ironically rewarded with traditional titles.

Nigerian society

Nigeria is a nation made up of over 350 ethnic groups, with as many cultural prescriptions. The only area of cultural unity and agreement among the various cultures is the cultural prescription of male domination. This is because over 98 percent of Nigeria's cultural groups practice patrilineal descent, patrilocal rule of residence, patriarchal authority and are patricentric in outlook. Only a few of the cultural groups like a section of the Yorubas, practice bilateral descent, but the authority is usually patriarchal, while the male child is still preferred to the female child. Two of the cultural groups have what looks like a matriarchal authority; with men acting as "overseers." Even in those cultures, the idea of bilateral descent and matriarchal authority, appears like a mirage, since never in the history of these societies has a woman become a traditional ruler. The implication of this is that whichever way one looks, the woman is socialized to be a "second class" citizen.

Nigeria has over 60 universities and possibly has the largest number of educated labor force in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet a lot of her populace, especially women, are still illiterates and semi-illiterates, while there is a 15 percent unemployment and underemployment.

The Nigerian economy has experienced a very slow growth rate, which places her as one of the weakest growing economies in the world, with a per capita income of US\$300 per annum between 1981 and 2000. Since 1960, when Nigeria obtained her independence from the British, she has never been able to achieve an annual growth rate of up to 7 percent. Between 1996 and 1999, the annual growth rate was 3 percent but between 1999 and 2000, it increased from 2.85 to 4.2 percent in the years 2000 and 2001 respectively. In spite of this increase in growth rate the impact on the overall standard of living in the country is not felt because during the same period, the population also grew at 3 percent per annum. Most Nigerians are poor because realistically most of them rely on agriculture for their survival, yet because of the oil boom, which unfortunately benefitted only a handful of top government functionaries, agriculture has been relatively neglected since 1970.

The Nigerian society has been plagued with a series of coups and counter-coups for many decades, before the current democratic government managed to survive. The implication of this is that the Nigerian national treasury was plundered and the economy was battered and almost totally destroyed. Thus corruption became institutionalized, while meritocracy and good governance was "murdered." The society was thus plunged into a terrible state of anomie.

The problem is that the way Nigerian society was being run then seems to encourage "cleptocracy" and financial mismanagement. This is because a lot of times when people get wealthy almost overnight, without a visible source of wealth, the government and the people seem either unwilling or unable to act, since no one is actually able to question the source of the new-found wealth. Instead they become the "beautiful bride" to be wooed by all; the toast of "praise singers"

and sycophants, while the "nouveau-riche" suddenly acquire a new sense of importance to the envy of the law abiding citizens. Thus the end seemed to justify the means to them in Nigeria, and naturally, the previous conformists usually got tempted either on their own or under pressure from their families or friends to keep up with the "Joneses" and "enjoy life too." The result of this is that more and more people felt that they have to go and "take their share of this national cake" too, since they stood a good chance of not being apprehended, but instead they may be admired and envied by others. In the same vein, a lot of politicians and people who scramble for political posts in the country now seem to be motivated by their desire to have a share of "this national cake" and become rich too. Thus, this problem then seemed to have been institutionalized. One implication of this is that the work culture of Nigerians is negatively affected. People now believe in financial mismanagement, some of which are usually referred to as "executive stealing." Many are thus not genuinely interested in work when they apply for jobs, but instead they are interested in getting rich through any possible means.

Some reforms have been introduced into the society by the current government of Olusegun Obasanjo. This focuses on specific measures that confront corruption, improve transparency and reduce economic crimes. This includes passing an anti-corruption bill, establishing the Independence Corrupt Practices Commission and the half-hearted efforts at entrenching rule of law. These efforts have been somewhat successful but there are still some "sacred cows" in the society who seem above all the laws of the land and are consequently above arrest and prosecution. Thus the success of the campaign is in jeopardy. Further, it is unclear why many of these corrupt individuals are allowed to become part of the prosecution process. However, official efforts to stamp out corruption are quite laudable and hopefully will keep getting more effective with public enlightenment programs.

Nigeria and women

All over the world, women share the primary responsibility for having and rearing children, for forming and maintaining families and for contraception. In the world of women, only very few countries can be classified as developed. This infers that in most countries of the world, the second-class status of women is usually institutionalized in their rules and regulations, home socialization and guidelines; sometimes including the country's constitution. In a lot of these countries women are expected to be seen and not heard. The official invincibility of women perpetuates the myth that what women do is less important, less significant and is generally subsumed under what their husband or other men in the society do (SEAGER and OLSON, 1986).

The status of women as "second class" citizens is reflected in all aspects of social life except in the areas of child rearing and socialization. This is clearly for the convenience of the patriarchal system and men, since most of the latter are not socialized to exhibit the attributes of a mother, like resilience, patience, persuasive power, endurance, undying love and carefulness. The implication of this is that the men have always been expected to control the home, the community, the office and the government (nation/country), yet Nigeria seems to have been deteriorating at an alarming rate since independence in 1960, morally, economically, socially and even culturally. The assessment of Nigeria internationally continues to be quite negative, putting it among the top three nations in terms of corruption. This does not reflect the overall situation, since the majority of Nigerians are suffering while a privileged few are plundering the wealth of the nation and never seem to have accumulated enough.

The Nigerian government has always theoretically supported the cause of women, but practically opposed them. For instance Nigeria was signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women, signed in December 1979 and it became a law in December 1981. The Federal government sponsored a number of women to join other women of the world in Beijing, in 1995, to discuss major issues affecting women. Similarly, Nigerian women were represented at the Copenhagen, Denmark Conferences of 1980 and 1995, and the Nairobi, Kenya Conferences of 1985 and 2000. However, all of these have been more of a "film trick" when it comes to real issues concerning women. This is because even the Nigerian legal system discriminates against women, and in spite of the presence of so many female lawyers and judges, they have not been able to make a lot of changes in the system. For instance, one of the crimes that is on the increase in Nigeria today is rape. Many men seem to enjoy raping women, because the law is very lenient with them. This is because in Nigeria, the law recommends that rape of men is a felony, which attracts three years imprisonment; while rape of women is a misdemeanor, for which the punishment is a statutory maximum of two years jail sentence. It is indeed difficult to find any logical explanation for the discriminatory law.

In the appointment into national positions, men are usually given priority yet the few women appointed (as shown in Obasanjo's democratic government) have shown that women are more honest, reliable and effective leaders than men. Many of them have been able to shun corrupt practices and show strong dedication to duty. Yet this has not made the Nigerian government increase the quota of female appointments. So it led a handful of women recently to come up with what they chose to call a "womanifesto" for women.

The Nigerian government seems to have tried to assist the working class women through the various "First Ladies," starting with Mrs Maryam Babangida. She established what she called a "Better Life for Rural Women." This ended up as a business venture for her for which she solicited and got a lot of donations, using Federal Government machinery. Next was Mrs Maryam Abacha who established her "Family Support Program." This was also "business as usual" using government machinery to enrich herself. Now, the current "first lady," Mrs Stella Obasanjo, has also established her "Child Care Trust." This is quite similar to the one established by the previous "first ladies" and she has also utilized government machinery to solicit, receive and utilize the funds as a personal "business" or project. Thus these so-called women-oriented projects end up as avenues for corruption and collection of the various first ladies' "shares of the national cake."

Besides this there are harmful widowhood practices in some parts of Nigeria, where when women die, it is natural, but when a man dies his wife or wives have to be subjected to such dehumanizing practices like forcing her to drink the bathwater of the dead husband (irrespective of the medical cause of death), to exonerate her from being "responsible" for his death. If she dies after drinking it then she is deemed to be responsible for his death, but if she survives it she is free. Unfortunately, men never have to drink the bathwater of their dead wives to exonerate themselves from the cause of their death.

In the area of education, women have been affected by Nigeria's patriarchal system. This is because so much preference is given to male children; that families have been known to have made their female children work to educate their male children and this has further widened the socio-economic gap between men and women. Similarly, in the face of economic crunch, when families are unable to afford the education of all their children, they are more likely to choose to educate the boys than the girls. Lack of education has thus made it ex-

tremely difficult for women to reap the positive fruits of globalization. This is because you need good education; not just basic literacy to be able to communicate, interact, have all the required confidence and progress.

Local identity in Nigeria

In Nigeria, as in many other parts of the world, globalization has negatively affected the traditional values, folkways, norms and mores, of the people. For Demba (1999), globalization has been synonymous with major economic, social, cultural and political disruptions; destruction, dislocation; painful and costly economic and social adjustment; increased economic and social uncertainty – all brought about by a steady erosion in state authority, large scale privatization, accentuation of deregulation, more open trade and investment policies in many parts of Africa,

Nigeria, which is a multi-cultural society with over 350 ethnic groups, has many cultural prescriptions which keep the society going and relatively together. With globalization of economy comes the globalization of culture and this makes it increasingly difficult for any one to draw a correct line to demarcate one cultural group from another. Theoretically that appears positive as one can only conclude that it will promote social integration and eventually lead to a unitary culture. Unfortunately, this can only happen if the so-called emergent unitary culture is an indigenous Nigerian one. However, this emergent culture is quite alien to Nigerian values, culture and society. Its origin can be found in Europe and America, while a lot of the prescriptions are anti-African and anti-extended family system, the foundation of African unity.

For instance in most parts of Nigeria there are universal cultural prescriptions like the following:

- Enforcement of deference to elders and superiors, which includes never questioning an adult's instructions or ideas.
- Owing social and financial responsibility to members of one's nuclear and extended family.
- Children's socialization is the joint responsibility of every member of one's nuclear and extended family including neighbors and friends.
- Marriage is a union between two families and not between two individuals. Thus families must approve a spouse before marriage takes place and marriage cannot be broken for flimsy reasons.
- One's children must stick to the observation of traditional funeral rights according to one's cultural prescriptions.
- Care of aged parents must be undertaken by children and families, as the sending of aged parents into old people's homes is seriously frowned upon and viewed as abomination.
- Incest taboo is a crime against the society and the spirits of one's ancestors; thus both have to be appeased in the unfortunate event of it happening.
- The patriarchal authority is the supreme authority of the land, thus women in most Nigerian cultures are expected to be seen and not heard. Whenever they raise their voices in protest, they are seen as forward, bad mannered and potentially bad wives.
- Girls are socialized to be highly trained in the art of housework; i.e. do a lot of housework, be emotional, gentle, patient, prepare the family's meal and socialize their children.
- Boys are socialized to tough, hard working, be in charge, confident and be the provider for their nuclear and extended families.
- Girls are supposed to dress modestly and not expose their bodies to others except their mothers and husbands.
- Adultery by women is an abomination which requires stringent punishment.
- Adultery by men is wrong but acceptable because "they are

in charge" and should not be questioned. Besides this, men who can afford to marry one hundred wives, can do so as long as they can satisfy them sexually and provide for them financially.

- Any member of your family can come to your house to stay or for a long-term visit without invitation, prior notice or your permission.

One cannot approve or disapprove of all these cultural prescriptions with a wave of the hand. Some are good and some are not. With globalization the following seem to be features of the emergent culture:

- Many of the youths do not have much regard or respect for their elders and usually dismiss their views and instructions as "old fashioned" and primitive.
- People now increasingly lay more emphasis on their nuclear families and refuse to carry the extended family burden.
- Nuclear families now do more of the socializing of their own children, while the role of the extended families here is now dormant or almost non-existent. This is because they are usually no longer around the nuclear families again.
- Nowadays men and women meet, fall in love with each other and only inform their parents later of their choice of a life partner. They often get married, with or without the family's consent, to spouses whose families they know almost nothing about.
- Funeral rites have been radically changed and compressed to two or three days, contrary to the traditional seven days.
- Increasingly, many old people now live alone, while a number are now sent to the few available old people's homes.
- The incidence of incest taboo among siblings and between fathers and daughters is on the increase and it is difficult to understand if it is a western influence from films on abused daughters or sisters or simply their interpretation of civilization.
- Nigerian families operate a strong patrilineage, yet women's voices are now slowly and steadily being heard. Also some Nigerian men now assist their wives with some household chores and the care of children.
- Now there are lots of women who are heads of households, provide for their families, are more educated than their husbands and sometimes even earn more than their husbands.
- Many girls and women now wear clothes that suit them or that they are comfortable in, contrary to the original cultural prescriptions. However in the name of fashion a lot of young ladies wear clothes that are too revealing nowadays, which may be one of the reasons for the increase in rape incidence in Nigeria today.
- In Nigeria men still have the tendency to be polygynous, but the financial responsibilities of such marriages and choices have been a great restraining factor. Thus many of them resort to being promiscuous; with the resultant fast spread of HIV/AIDS in the country.
- Now if any relation of yours come unannounced to visit you or stay with you, you can refuse and or send him or her back with the complaint of lack of money or space in your house. Previously, this would have incurred the wrath of your family or village against you.

In addition to the above, globalization has led to the deviancy of a number of youths as there is a great rush to behave and talk like an American. This includes mimicking a lot of things they watch in the movies; calling adults or superiors by their first names; using swear words and dirty language; wearing of trousers that hang from their hips; and strange gestures and mannerisms. This has been a source of worry for many Nigerian families as such behavior has made their children and wards unable to reap the positive dividends of globalization and western education. These youths have simply been

deviants and drop-outs because most of the Americans they copy are the working class ones, the uneducated, the drug addicts, deviants and lower socio-economic status people.

Conclusion – The way forward

Globalization has been a mixed blessing for Nigeria. It has helped the global awareness of women and Nigerians in general. It is also supposed to remove all the visible and invisible barriers to successful economic trade. It has especially led to the development of information technology which has been instrumental in the transformation of the world into a global village. However the fruits of globalization are not all sweet. There are sour ones as well, some of which include the further depression of the already low socio-economic and socio-cultural status of women and the attitudes and behavior of Nigerian youths. Globalization has also pushed Nigerian society into a state of anomie, the result of which is confusion, corruption, entrenchment of mediocrity and a number of other vices.

The following recommendations should be considered with a view to correcting the problems created by globalization in Nigeria:

- The Federal, State and Local governments should each improvise the machinery to filter through the types of foreign films and music that is put on the air over Nigerian radios and national TVs.
- The education of the girl child should be a major policy for each branch of the Nigerian Government.
- The conscious inclusion of women in the governance of the country should be religiously done.
- The Nigerian cultural prescriptions should include clauses that will guarantee the improvement of the status of the girl child.
- The Nigerian Government should devise an efficient Social Security Scheme that will guarantee the future of all Nigerians. This will reduce corruption and financial mismanagement.
- Anyone guilty of official corruption or financial mismanagement should be publicly exposed and openly prosecuted. This will serve as a deterrent to others who may be nursing such ambition.
- Finally meritocracy should be entrenched in the society, while mediocrity should be de-emphasized. This will improve Nigerian work culture and high labor turnover.

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