
The impact of globalization on education and gender: an emergent cross-national balance

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This article brings together globalization and gender, two unavoidable subjects in the analysis of our contemporary world. Globalization must be considered because “it is the underlying structural dynamics that drives social, political, economic, and cultural processes around the world” (Robinson, 2003). And gender because it is constitutive of most social relations and a common ground on which to construct power on a daily basis. Though gender might work as a contingent element of reality, it is present in all spheres of society and most moments of social life.

Gender and power go together, with masculinity holding a steady advantage under most circumstances. Gender, however, is proving to be an increasingly complex concept because it presents multiple forms as it intersects with other powerful social markers. It is clear that we need to analyze with greater specificity the linkages between gender and other forms of subordination such as ethnicity, race, and social class. The importance of their crosscutting nature is being recognized under the frame of intersectoral analysis or intersectionality, which was defined at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (in Durban, South Africa), as “compound discrimination, double or multiple discrimination.” Intersectoral analysis becomes crucial in these times of globalization for it enables us to see under what conditions the exclusion of women is deepened.

The meanings of globalization

Globalization is a concept that everyone uses and, consequently and not surprisingly, it has acquired multiple meanings. But two very different versions are emerging: one that emphasizes the technological aspects and another the economic and political aspects associated with it.

Technological globalization

Some observers focus on the interconnectedness among people and countries that is becoming ever wider, deeper, and faster (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, 1999; Castells, 2000; Friedman, 1999). Through technologies such as DVDs, laptop computers, storage media, Internet, satellite TV, cellular telephones, and videoconferencing, globalization creates spectacular opportunities for increasing the dissemination of information and dialogue. The increased communication contributes toward a more interactive world, one in which communication and transactions can emerge between people who may never meet. There is indeed a shift toward the compression of time and space with today's information and transportation technologies. The Internet, in particular, permits instantaneous personal dialogue and communication. This inexpensive means of communication has been particularly helpful to women activists from the South, who now are able to exchange ideas on a regular basis with colleagues from both the South and the North.

The considerable flow of information, however, does not equate communication with knowledge or wisdom. The information received through the Internet, for instance, must still be digested and put into an analytical framework. Often, the information received is neither complete nor accurate. Furthermore, exchanging information among people is not tantamount to *sharing* ideas, values, and objectives. The knowledge and ideas transmitted are not necessarily adopted by the recipients, who may, in fact, oppose them. Further, the world evinces inequality in the access to telecommunications. Although this may change over time, at present 20 percent of the world's richest individuals account for 93.3 percent of Internet access. The poorest 20 percent represent only 0.2 percent of the Internet access while the remaining 60 percent of the world represents 6.5 percent of the Internet access (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1999). To call ourselves a 'network society' highlights the salience of technology and acknowledges the significant contributions of fast and inexpensive communication to needed social action but implies a much more even distribution of knowledge and access to technology than is the case at present.

Economic globalization

Globalization today is much more than technology. The advances in technology have both facilitated and been affected by new economic strategies – a position that strongly promotes market-led decision-making, or what we commonly term neoliberalism. Robinson underscores the economic side of globalization when he defines globalization as “the near-culmination of a centuries-long process of the spread of capitalist production around the world” (2004, p.6). The market-led ideologies that prevail today have resulted in a steady removal of the state from productive activities and in the vigorous defense of free trade as the key means to achieve greater economic growth.

Additional features of economic globalization are: (1) militarism, which now seems to call for acceptance of the principle of preemptive war, internationally changing the roles of countries that were supposed to be neutral following World War II (Japan now sends arms to Iraq and Indian Sea countries), and which makes defense a priority issue for countries, which then shift governmental investments accordingly, and (2) religious fundamentalism, as the notion of good and evil becomes expedient to distinguish countries and justify conflict among them. We are seeing higher levels of religious fundamentalism than existed 50 years ago, a fundamentalism that visibly affects Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus (Correa, 2003).

Fundamentalism is a major force today because people with strong religious beliefs or under the influence of religious leaders are shaping government action, particularly court decisions affecting women’s rights in major countries, such as India and the U.S.

For many developing countries, the neoliberal model of the economy prevents the design and implementation of sectoral policies and inhibits regional development. Two permanent sources of tension pitting domestic needs against international obligations and pressures produce an ineffectual state. First, the amount of political power wielded by the private sector has grown tremendously: typically, a handful of transnational corporations control many national economies and often function as oligopolies in which one or two enterprises dominate any given sector. Second, the pressures generated by the external debt jeopardize the future of many countries in serious ways.

To ensure payment of the external debt, international financial institutions have promoted the design and implementation of major changes in the economies of debtor countries. There is consensus that these structural

adjustment programmes (SAPs) constitute the primary mechanism through which globalization has affected people in developing countries and, particularly, women's lives in the South (Desai, 2002). SAPs establish the economic priorities of countries and shape their government programmes for debt repayment in order to qualify those countries for new lines of credit. Such programmes usually call for opening national economies to global trade, engaging in government austerity, and engaging in privatization of state enterprises (Patel and McMichael, 2004). SAPs invariably call for reduced government budgets; consequently, few countries are able to honour redistributive welfare rights.

In the neo-liberal setting, there exists the belief that progress depends on individual effort and on individual solutions. Thus, it is assumed that state action is unnecessary and even harmful. With economic globalization, certain countries and certain groups of people (mostly in the North and some in Asia) have benefited greatly. In many other regions, the benefits have been uneven. In these, the majority of people have not gained; the clearest indicator of this is the increase in the numbers of poor people whose income has declined: between 1965 and 1980, 200 million people saw their income decline; in 1998, this figure reached one billion (UNDP, 1996). The polarization of income in Latin America, for instance, is increasingly severe: the richest 1 percent were earning 363 times the income of the poorest 1 percent in 1970; by 1997 the gap had reached 417 times (Kliksberg, 2001).

Further debilitating the potential of education is the pace of growth of the external debt, a pace outrunning the rate of economic growth in the developing countries. According to data from the primary creditor, the World Bank, the external debt of the Third World grew at an annual average of 5.7 percent between 1990 and 2000, from \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion. During the same period \$2.6 billion was paid in interest by the developing countries. Vice-President Atiku Abubakar of Nigeria (*Newsletter*, 2004) noted that in the late 1970s his country, the largest in Africa, borrowed \$2 billion from the international community. By 2004 it had paid about \$28 billion and still has an outstanding debt of nearly \$30 billion. The shift of funds from the South to the North means that fewer resources can be used at the country level, for either infrastructural investments or social welfare concerns. National budgets are currently defined first in terms of what must be assigned to the payment of the external debt.

Salient features of labour under globalization have been ‘downward leveling’ (or the cross-national search for lower production costs), deunionization, and ‘ad hoc’ and ‘just-in-time’ labour supply, all widely recognized to have created a new global underclass (Robinson, 2004). Knowledge workers – those with high levels of education and in the areas of finance capital, commodity markets, business, and expertise in certain areas of the economy – have benefited from high salaries and bonuses. There have been some gains for skilled workers in the periphery of the global economy, but the majority of workers today function on short-term contracts and face job uncertainty. As production becomes more technologically intensive, the prediction is that capitalists will seek not only countries with the lowest wages but also countries where taxation and environmental requirements are also the lowest. This strategy suggests that the educational component of countries will figure as merely one more factor – not necessarily the decisive one – in the complex calculation of the global production market.

The liberalization of the world’s economy has enabled products to flood the global market and many of these products can be bought at costs lower than when national protectionist policies were in place, resulting in a stunting of the economic growth of some regions and a division of the economic pie across regions in very unequal ways. The GDP per capita in Africa increased from \$1,500 to \$2,000 between 1960 and 1980, but since then it has stagnated at that level (Artadi and Sala-i-Martin, 2003). By 2001, the GDP per capita for Sub-Saharan Africa (which includes all African countries except Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) was \$200 dollars less than it was in 1974, a decline of nearly 11 percent over 25 years (Artadi and Sala-i-Martin, 2003). We have increasing evidence that liberalization does not increase economic growth or social justice. World trade has increased 6 percent annually over the past 20 years, twice as fast as the world real GDP, indicating a deepening of economic integration. Developing countries today account for one-third of the world trade, up from one-fourth in the early 1970s. However, the economic growth has not been labour-intensive, it has produced small salaries, and increased inequality in the work place, but also of such assets as land and human capital.

The discourse of economic globalization has taken away attention from poverty, and the causes of poverty are not sufficiently attacked at present (Kliksberg, 2001). There is ample recognition of the importance of human capital and its two important components: health and education. Yet, little is invested in these sectors relative to the need. Health is a major detriment to

growth in Africa; the problem of malaria, initially the most severe, has been surpassed by AIDS in recent years. As Artadi and Sala-i-Martin observe, “At this moment, Africans have neither the resources nor the expertise to discover vaccines to prevent AIDS or malaria and rich countries have little incentive to invest in these lines of research because the discoveries will help people with little ability to buy the products” (2003, pp.17-18).

The economy-gender link

Globalization is having a visible impact on social and economic development. The structural adjustment programmes imposed by external debt and the economic and political crises that ensue have been shown to affect women and men differentially, with women assuming the larger costs. A key question to explore is, What is the overall balance for gender equality and equity?

Gender is present in all economic and social change. The division of labour and differential social expectations internalized by both women and men assign to women the role of main providers of caring labour, inexpensive labour, and unpaid labour at home. Women face not only symbolic penalties – lack of recognition of their multiple qualities and hardships – and the appropriation of their contributions with little or no remuneration, but also material disadvantages in their limited access to landed property, education, technology, and credit.

Globalization presumably gives everyone an equal chance if each individual just improves his or her educational levels. Overall, levels of education have increased throughout the world. But we are seeing that globalization is not eliminating the persistent oligarchic and patriarchal forces that prevent women from moving into spheres of economic and political power. The schooling that is provided in practically all countries addresses gender ideologies only marginally (if at all) and is thus not able to counter them. The prevailing norms, practices, rules, regulations do not permit serious efforts to use gender as a crosscutting theme and mechanism in public policy or in the labour market to provide attention to the redressing of inequalities between women and men and to the diminution of the femininity-masculinity polarity.

Liberalization has had negative consequences among low-level workers: by 2000, women constituted over 36 percent of the total global workforce, a growth of approximately 10 percent since 1970. However, the number of

women in unpaid work at home had also increased (Desai, 2002). With free trade and reduction of tariffs, many factories in the United States moved to Mexico, hurting the ethnic minorities and women that comprised the bulk of factory workers in the U.S. In developing countries women have gained access to remunerated labour, yet they encounter low wages, overtime requirements, and dead-end jobs (Desai, 2002).

Sex differentials in wages are still here, even in countries that are the 'winners' in the economic globalization process. In the U.S. in 2001 men without a high school diploma earned on average over \$23,000 while similarly educated women earned \$16,000; women with a high school diploma earned \$21,000 while men earned \$32,000 (Wood, cited in Culver and Burge, 2004). Research findings from industrialized countries also show the disadvantaged conditions of women's work. Australian women were found to earn one-third less than men in equivalent positions in 15 industries, across 350 jobs and from 55 companies; women in full-time positions earned 81 percent of their male counterparts' salary packages (Mallock, 2004). In Germany, women's wages and salaries range between 65 to 78 percent of men's. German women represent 42 percent of the labour force, but they represent 84 percent of all part-time workers (Moon and Jaesoer, 2001, cited in Kraus and Carter, 2004). In 1999 German women represented 9 percent of the positions in management and were not in leadership positions: they represented 75 percent of the total staff of hospitals but only 4 percent of the physicians (Kraus and Carter, 2004). The situation in Canada is also negative for many women. Clerical and technical workers, often women, are seeing their jobs become more complex but do not receive increased pay benefits, recognition of their contribution, and reduction in other duties (Fenwick, 2004b). Since many changes in the Canadian economy began in early 1980s, women are now earning less, have lowered their vocational expectations and are registering decreased access to learning and advancement opportunities; women also report experiencing greater work-family conflict than in the past (Fenwick, 2004a). Considered a very successful employment alternative, self-employment has been highly recommended for women. However, it has some undesirable features. Data from Canada reveal that women in self-employment are located in the lowest paying forms of service (piece-work, telecommunications, and tailoring) and end up isolated in their homes where sharply gendered labour divisions and traditional gendered role expectation create considerable burdens for them. Also in Canada, it has been found that women-owned enterprises tend to concentrate in gender-segregated, labour-intensive industries (clerical, retail, hospitality, and personal services) (Fenwick, 2004a).

China is considered in the popular and academic press as the most successful case of a developing country in the times of globalization. Yet, data from China's industrialization in rural areas (Dong, Macphail and Bowles, 2004) reveal that considerable gender segmentation is taking place, with women present only in certain types of production. Women were preferred for textiles, clothing, and food industries, while men were preferred for steel products and farm tools production. According to a survey of workers in 39 industrial enterprises in the provinces of Shandong and Jiangsu, women are reported to have less control over their work, not to receive an economic return to experience, to face less opportunity for skill development, and to be adversely affected by wage discrimination. Men workers in those industrial enterprises were found to have greater shares of ownership (a major benefit from the privatization process) of the new private firms. The researchers found that men owned almost double the number of shares of women and the average value of shareholdings for male workers was 3.32 times that of female workers. Dong *et al.* also found that there had been an increase in the gender wage rate gap, from 29 to 39 percentage points between the pre- and post-privatization periods. After controlling for relevant factors such as education and experience, researchers determined that between 82 and 94 percent of the wage gap could be attributable to gender discrimination (Dong *et al.*, 2004).

Globalization has had a negative impact on micro and small enterprises, affecting both men and women, and thus causing an increase in migration flows. Women who remain at home or end up in *maquila* (assembly-line) production face low wages and unstable employment. Not surprisingly, organized women have taken positions against the agreements on free trade in Latin America and the Caribbean, accusing them of not addressing equity, justice, diversity and sustainability (International Seminar on Globalization and the Women's Movement, 2004). The available economic data, while not exhaustive, indicate that there is a significant interaction between gender and race: Afro-Brazilian women with 11-14 years of education receive hourly wages equivalent to 39 percent of their white men counterparts (CEPAL, 2004). Women in developing countries are also encountering a harsher ecological environment, so that they must work harder for fuel and water in certain parts of the world.

Neoliberal regimes have refrained from engaging in major wealth redistribution. Privatization (or denationalization to reassert market mechanisms) and liberalization have led to the reduction of the power of trade unions; not having a solid leverage position, workers are not able to increase

their wages. A major mechanism of wealth redistribution, land reform, is in the governmental agenda mostly in symbolic ways; this is so even in countries that have made a substantial progress toward democracy. In South Africa, for instance, by 1997, the government had redistributed the equivalent of only 0.3 percent of all land transfers (representing about 3 percent of all agricultural land, UNDP, 2003); all others were private transfers. Land is being allocated primarily by local/tribal authorities, which distributed 70.6 percent of the land in 2004. While the land is passing to communities rather than individuals, it is unclear how women are benefiting from the ongoing distribution.

Underlying these growing inequalities are not just market forces but also individual and group attitudes that accept those conditions. What changes are there in citizenship and rights by women now that they have entered the labour market in large numbers? Are women indeed crossing the boundaries between public and private spheres now that they have gained increased access to remunerated employment? What have been the consequences of male migration upon women's decision-making and roles? Apparently, the gains have been limited. As Walters (2004) argues, neoliberal capitalism includes the extraction of emotional and sexual resources by both privatizing and exploiting caring labour — tasks that mostly women continue to fulfill.

In short, the simultaneous increase in the incorporation of women in education and labour markets has not meant a change in gender roles; structural inequalities between men and women persist. Moreover, the prevailing image of the productive and optimistic worker has reduced resistance to gendered work and encouraged people to take advantage of the supposed opportunities of the New Economy (Fenwick, 2004b). In response to the economic challenges, women are presenting resistance both at the individual and collective levels. Individually, women in Germany are responding by limiting their reproduction, hiring household workers and marrying later (Kraus and Carter, 2004). Women in many countries are mobilizing and organizing themselves into non-governmental organizations (NGOs), groups that have an increasing political presence domestically and abroad.

Globalization and education

Globalization brings education to the front lines. In the prevailing discourse, education is expected to be the major tool for incorporation into the 'knowledge society' and the technological economy. In my view, these are

exaggerated expectations. Education is indeed being democratized as more people achieve higher levels of education. Yet, education is only one factor in economic growth, and the rewards from education are quite finite, being usufructed mostly by those with high levels of education. Two key questions to consider regarding education are: what is globalization doing to knowledge? and what is globalization doing to equity policies?

The short response is that knowledge, through schooling, is becoming a commodity: a service people buy according to their preference and economic means. When knowledge is a commodity, then schools and universities are market places, not terrains that contribute to redress inequalities. Equity policies are being relegated to second place. Dominant discourses about the “the new economy” emphasize individual opportunity, knowledge generation, and continuous learning, but at the same time, there is “widespread retraction of government funding and services related to both general education and training and gender equity” (Fenwick, 2004a, p.148).

The main impacts of SAPs in developing countries upon education have been: reduction in educational expenditures (states are required to keep a zero-deficit budget), the decentralization of educational systems (ostensibly to permit greater parental participation and the adjustment of curriculum to local contexts, but often to decrease central government costs in education), and evaluations to make educational systems internationally comparable and move them toward convergence in content and performance. However, the falling of per capita income of many nations has increased the opportunity costs of children, particularly those in rural areas, while simultaneously increasing the direct costs of education (fees, textbooks, uniforms, school transportation), and accelerating the migration of highly trained human capital to countries in the North (Bonal, 2002).

Three types of education provision are emerging: public, private non-profit, and private-for-profit. The hierarchies in which these types of schools function vary across nations, depending on their historical development. In Latin America, for instance, private non-profit carries more prestige than public and for-profit schools at all levels. In some parts of Africa, public education may carry more prestige than private; either nonprofit or for-profit. Below I discuss the salient impacts of technological and economic globalization in education. Because the dynamics affecting primary and secondary education present some clear differences from those affecting higher education, I discuss the Grades R-12 and higher education levels of education separately.

Primary and secondary education

Enrolment expansion. In the context of globalization, because of the workers' need to compete for the few good jobs globalization creates, the demand for educational expansion has increased. Parents realize education is an asset in modern society and invest, to the extent of their financial means, in schooling for their children. As a result, enrolments are rising, except in the poorest countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. The expanded access is also contributing to a sizable reduction in the gap between girls and boys. At the same time, expansion has been accompanied by the emergence of highly differentiated educational circuits, with children of different social classes being enrolled in different schools deemed appropriate for their status and with minimum social contact with each other.

User fees. Much of the expansion of education in several countries has taken place through increased parental share of schooling costs. In a number of countries, primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa, students at as low as the primary level of education must pay fees to attend even public schools – a measure totally contrary to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose Article 26 declares that basic education shall be free and compulsory. In other countries, where education is said to be free, there remain a number of expenditures that are contributed by parents either in cash or in kind. The provision of education, therefore, represents a cost for parents. Some of them can afford to make this investment that will take several years to generate a good rate of return. Other parents, especially those in rural areas, cannot afford to engage in long- or medium-term planning. Consequently, they keep at home whoever is needed most for domestic work or who is not expected to yield direct medium-term benefits to the household: daughters. School fees operate as a major obstacle to the universalization of primary education (UNESCO, 2003).

At present, two global policies, Education for All and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, call for the provision of universal education throughout the world and gender parity in the provision of all levels of education by 2015. Although it would seem that these global equity policies coexist with neoliberal policies, the fact is that countries prioritize the latter over the former. In the case of Sub-Saharan African countries, for example, social spending, including education, fell by 26 percent between 1980 and 1985 (Committee on Academic Freedom in Africa, 1992, cited in Rassool, 2004, p.136).

Privatization and liberalization of schooling. These mechanisms have been justified on the basis of producing greater efficiency, as now the ‘customers’ (the parents) can vote with their feet and are not bound to a state monopoly. Easing rules for the creation of schools facilitates a rapid increase of new service providers. The international financial institutions, notably the World Bank, have insisted on the introduction of user fees in health and of cost-sharing and privatization in educational services to reduce national budget deficits. Yet, privatization of education has also meant its treatment as one more commodity in the marketplace, leading to the loss of education as a major terrain for the construction of a nation-state based on values and norms of solidarity and respect for all.

Measures that have not been particularly successful in the United States, such as the provision of school vouchers and the creation of charter schools, have been strongly recommended to education systems in developing countries. In the few countries where these measures have been tried (vouchers in Colombia and Chile, and charter schools in El Salvador), they have not produced greater learning but have resulted in greater efficiency, defined as lower governmental costs and greater parental expenditure (except in Chile, as noted below).

Decentralization. This measure, like privatization, is expected to generate more efficient schools as they are able to establish a flexible and more efficient bureaucracy with parents able to participate in their governance, hence strengthening civil society. Central ministries of education, it is true, control most of the financial resources and the form and content of schooling, making their administration of rural areas incomplete and even inappropriate. While there is merit in the notion of tailoring schooling to local needs, the empirical evidence shows that only in very few cases (Chile being a good example), has decentralization been accompanied by increased monetary resources to regions or municipalities, training for the new roles at the local level, and the allocation of decision-making prerogatives to the new decentralized units. An economic condition that does not favour educational decentralization is the reduced national budget, which is now often controlled by ministries of finance and economics, whose overriding concern is the payment of the external debt.

Quality. Educational access with quality is very much part of the globalization discourse. Since sufficient resources are rarely available for improvements in the school infrastructure and teacher training, in practice, the most tangible form of quality is circumscribed to testing of students. Cross-national

comparisons of student performance based on standardized testing are becoming a regular practice. Sponsored by the international financial organizations and multinational bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the comparisons that bring together industrialized and developing countries find that poor countries evince much lower levels of performance than rich countries and that poor students have lower performance levels than rich students within all countries. This wealth-based differential performance across and within countries is often used to criticize the shortcomings of the public school rather than to seek to correct and strengthen conditions in the public system, especially the problem of low-salaried teachers, which often dissuades the best of them from remaining in the system.

Quality, defined as an educational content that enables students to obtain the knowledge they require for the construction of an equitable social and economic world, is not provided by most schools, and such mechanisms as affirmative action to correct women's subaltern status is simply absent in educational public policies. The measures in place to enhance the 'efficiency' and 'productivity' of schooling have not been designed from a gender perspective. They have impacted on both boys and girls, with negative consequences on the education of students from poor families and rural residence. Given the confluence of gender, social class, and ethnicity, girls who are poor, indigenous, and rural are suffering more than boys.

Higher education

Expansion. Globalization has fostered considerable demand for higher education throughout the world, as greater levels of remuneration accrue at higher levels of education. Many countries are moving toward achieving mass higher education (defined as having an enrolment of 40 percent or more of the age 18-24 population). Data for 18 Latin American countries, covering 1977 to 1998, indicate that the rates of return to higher education increased during that period (Behrman, Birdsall and Szekely, 2003).

Much of the expansion is taking place through private provision or through the application of tuition fees within public universities. As tuition increasingly becomes a large proportion of the total income of universities, there is a trend for those fees to be high and increase over time. Since higher education is not independent of private resources, the rapid expansion of higher education has

not curtailed the impact of family background. Data from Chile (Donoso and Schiefelbein, 2004) indicate that few students from families with incomes below the national average are able to afford the entrance exam required for public universities, and even fewer students from poor families enrol in the commercial programmes that prepare students for the university entrance exam.

A considerable part of the expansion of higher education is also due to the sprouting of distance education programmes, which have low entrance requirements, and foreign universities operating in developing countries. Communication technologies such as the Internet and its Websites make it possible for higher education courses to reach individuals in distant places and at times convenient for them.

Diversification. The rapid expansion of higher education has taken place through the creation of programmes that address market and social needs in flexible ways and prepare individuals for multiple types of jobs. At the same time, diversification has meant the emergence of universities, colleges, and technical and vocational institutes with very different levels of academic emphasis, quality, and recognition. Diversification benefits society because there is a greater distribution of knowledge and this knowledge becomes increasingly accessible to a population that had not had this chance before. Simultaneously, diversification leaves unchallenged the polarization of the educational system, as elite universities remain at the top levels of social prestige and thus preserve the traditional hierarchies.

Quality. At the level of higher education, unlike K-12, student testing does not become the key indicator of quality.¹ Instead, rankings between universities (ironically, derived from non-academic sources), become the annual contest. In several countries, including China and South Africa, mergers of colleges and universities have arisen as mechanisms to enhance institutional quality.

The pursuit of quality works against equality at present. Current developments in South Africa illuminate this issue. Invoking the need to participate competitively in the global economy, the number of institutions offering MBA

¹ Efforts have been initiated in countries such as Brazil and Colombia, by which students are given tests at the end of their undergraduate studies that serve consequently to determine their university's ranking.

degrees in the country has been reduced. All of six fully accredited institutions are in the Gauteng or the Western Cape, two of the richest and most advanced provinces of South Africa. At the time of writing, the fully accredited institutions do not include any in KwaZulu-Natal, the most populous province (*Financial Times*, 28 June 2004). The call for quality in South Africa has also served to close a number of Black-only universities; an unintended consequence of this decision has been that the university as a centre for Black nationalism might be tamed and eventually disappear.

Knowledge as commodity. In the same way that individuals buy their education, business firms buy their research. While there is nothing unethical in the acquisition of ideas for profit, the growing nature of research for sale carries undesirable consequences. First, the university/enterprise ties foster instrumental knowledge – that which has a very clear and even immediate application. In this context, instrumental or problem-solving research, unfortunately, is not defined by society at large but by entrepreneurs seeking solutions to specific production problems. Second, problem-solving research of this nature gives greater importance to some fields, such as medicine (benefiting the wealthy or those who can buy medicines), engineering, and the natural sciences, with much less attention going to fields that promote appreciation and critical reflection of society such as the humanities and the social sciences. Third, knowledge as commodity favours the satisfaction of individual over social needs. Higher education institutions thus emphasize curricula that are more marketable, charging high fees for their students. Well-established or newly formed entrepreneurial universities from the U.S., the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa, capitalizing on the marketability of English, offer programmes to many countries of the world. Recent negotiations within the World Trade Organization include education as another tradable good, subject to privatization and liberalization.

Unquestionably, the circulation of ideas and printed materials has increased through the privatized provision of higher education. It remains to be seen to what extent education for profit and its curricula addresses core social issues, including the formation of citizenship values and awareness of the need for social justice. Some observers argue that the presence of more higher education institutions at local levels will improve the efficiency of national higher education, as global knowledge will be made to harmonize with local knowledge and needs. But it is rather doubtful that this ‘harmonization’ will end with considerable local knowledge being respected and thus absorbed.

The entrepreneurial university. As universities become obliged to generate their own resources, they are shifting their character from academic to entrepreneurial institutions that are attentive to market possibilities to satisfy demand for both particular degrees and programmes as well as for particular types of research products (see Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, for case studies around this development). The generation of income thus comes accompanied by the creation of an entrepreneurial culture and changes in the organizational structure to provide constant assessment of the market and quick response to its needs and requests. Universities are therefore developing denser administrative layers and greater communication between the university and the industrial/commercial community. On the positive side, this promotes trends toward greater interdisciplinarity within the university; on the negative side, much of this interdisciplinarity focuses on solutions to existing production problems and considerably less on social problems.

Competition is leading universities to forget social aims. Even in California, one of the richest states in the U.S., the government eliminated its effective socially-evening affirmative action programme in 1995 (no longer allowing race, ethnicity, and gender attributes to influence admission to public universities) and, by 2004, was eliminating outreach programmes – instructional and counselling services that enable minority students to make a more effective transition into the demands of higher education – even though these programmes comprised at most 1 percent of the general state allocation to its public university system (Torres, 2004).

Competition across and within universities generates a search for excellence; therefore, no one wishes to acknowledge failure. As quality assurance becomes an omnipresent principle, concern is shown for ranking, sorting, scores, and league tables (Blackmore, 2004). Preoccupation with problems such as social cohesion, class stratification, and gender and racial inequalities is reduced to a minimum despite prevailing rhetoric about the university's concern with major social problems.

Creating profitable units within the university or generating financial resources for it becomes highly rewarded. In industrialized nations, the 'publish or perish' principle is gradually being replaced by 'produce funded-research or perish.' Academic research for which large sponsorship is unavailable is considered a thing of the past and even penalized in annual performance evaluations. Topics such as gender and adult education, are left to languish and professors engaging in them lose salary and academic standing.

Governance. Traditional faculty governance is losing to administrators' management, creating a climate in which decisions are based on profit margins and the ability to recruit fee-paying students rather than on the merit of the knowledge sought or distributed. Most high-level administrators are men and typically blind to gender issues. Along with the emergence of a new administrative approach, globalization has brought about a new professoriate, less protected by tenure, without even stable or full-time employment. Data from British higher education indicate that in 1997-98, of 17 000 academic appointments only 18 percent were to permanent contracts, in contrast to 40 percent in 1994-95. A similar decline in tenure-track professors is being reported all over the world.

All of the changes discussed above are altering the nature of the university. If in the past its mission included being a place that could support democracy and foster social critique, today it is giving way to serving mostly as an organization where the productive edge of the country can be made competitive. While expansion of higher education is taking place, the advantageous position of the wealthier social classes continues as before, with the added feature that now this advantage is no longer questioned. Researchers that have observed the continuous stratification of higher education, argue that the expansion of higher education to be truly democratic will require an increase in the quality and equality of primary and secondary schooling so that low-income students may be able to compete (Donoso and Schiefelbein, 2004).

Education and gender

Our socialization into the value of schooling is so effective that many of us fail to see educational settings as fundamental sites for the reproduction of societal norms, values, and ideologies, including gender ideologies. Despite having greater access to schooling than in the past, women are still being prepared for domesticity and subservience. This happens to a great extent by default, through the school's failure to question the current functioning of gender in society and by not introducing emancipatory curriculum and school practices to counter traditional gender messages in society at large.

In rural and illiterate areas in Africa and Asia, girls are perceived as even more inferior to boys. Speaking from the African context, Mlama (2001) holds that this leads parents to resist enrolling girls in school, to refuse paying their

school fees, to withdraw girls from school for early marriage, and to provide them with little encouragement to perform well in school. In many African countries, even if governments succeed in enrolling all the children in school, as seems to be the case at the grade one level, many girls will continue to drop out by the upper grades of primary school due to the costs of school fees, boy-preference by parents, and cultural norms that affect girls negatively: passive sexuality leading to pregnancy or HIV/AIDS, and early marriage (Mlama, 2001).

From a gender perspective, three key questions apply to educational systems regardless of globalization: Does the curriculum content promote gender equality? Does the learning environment foster assertiveness and empowerment in girls? Are teachers emotionally, socially, and pedagogically prepared to deal with gender issues in their daily practice? We have neither comprehensive nor recent data sets to answer these questions, yet the following can be said:

The gendered content of school knowledge. Textbooks throughout the world have improved a great deal in terms of gender, presenting today more references to women in important social and historical roles and more illustrations of women figures. Nonetheless, the depiction of women still tends to be in subordinated and passive roles. Teaching practices that demean girls are still prevalent in many educational systems. The efforts to train teachers in gender issues have not progressed very much; these measures are infrequent and overwhelmingly characterized by very short-time interventions.

Because of the school experience and the relentless mass media messages pushing youths toward careless sexuality, erroneous cultural attitudes about the innate differences between girls and boys prevail. These mentalities have also been detected in industrialized countries. A study of Canadian students in secretarial courses found that the women develop notions of femininity as associated with care and support, and less linked to technical skills (Gaskell, 1995, cited in Lakes and Carter, 2004). And correcting these stereotypes is not easy. The 'Break-Up' Project in Norway and Denmark, which attempted to place women in male-dominated occupations through apprenticeships and direct recruitment, concluded that a better strategy was not to bring women into male occupations but to "upgrade the traditional female occupations" (Mjelde, 2004, p.166). Policies in Norway today include the 'domestication of men' by providing them with time off their labour situation to take care of children and housework.

The discourse of globalization does not recognize that we still live in a gendered-world. To the extent that problems are now anchored in the individual and hence to be resolved through individual agency, the pervading power of gender ideologies and related structural conditions do not receive much attention either in governmental policies or in school initiatives. We know that citizenship calls for political negotiation and that rights are not given freely but must be won through hard struggle. But if citizenship is not just about awareness of rights but about exercising them, how does education prepare women to do so? How does education prepare men to promote an egalitarian world? How does the state foster the sensitization of parents to such issues such as their daughters' early marriage and occupational choices? How does the state enable poor parents to invest in their daughters' schooling? The empirical evidence of state action to correct negative cultural practices and beliefs indicates only perfunctory political intervention.

Education and sexuality. A pillar of women's empowerment involves their assertiveness *vis-à-vis* others and, as philosopher Hannah Arendt remarked, their conviction that "women have the right to have rights." Through various world conferences, notably the Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), progress has been made in the recognition of *reproductive rights* (which include making decisions on whom to marry, when to have children, how many children to have, the right to contraceptives, and the right to medical attention before and during childbearing). *Sexual rights*, which are essential to women's empowerment, are still far from being universally recognized. A declaration drafted by the World Association of Sociology in 1997 and endorsed by the World Health Organization shortly afterwards, identifies important areas in which to engage in educational work: the right to have a safe sexual life; the right to have sex education; the right to seek, receive, and provide information regarding sexuality; and the right to have consensual sexual relations. The introduction of this type of knowledge should be a priority agenda in the education of girls and boys.

New actors in education

Ongoing neoliberal policies in developing countries have generated new influential actors, notable among them the international financial institutions (IFIs) and nongovernmental organizations. They tend to pursue divergent objectives and it is precisely in this tension that possibilities for positive change may emerge for gender and education.

The IFIs. Banks are becoming increasingly powerful in the educational arena, primarily through their influence on country compliance to SAPs and timely external debt payments. IFIs also shape significantly the bilateral agencies, which often fully endorse their recommendations. Not only are the IFS influential in the formal negotiation process and in informal contacts with national bureaucrats, but they are also expanding their action by establishing their own dissemination and training centres. The World Bank recently created the Global Development Network, which includes an Educational Policy Research Network. It organised a global conference to take place in April 2005 to examine “what accumulated research says about key policy issues and to discuss how obstacles to more and other research may be overcome.” The Inter-American Development Bank now provides Internet courses for policy makers and university professors on a variety of educational administration subjects, including one on ‘ethics and social capital’. These examples reflect a powerful deployment of external resources to shape domestic educational policy.

Making a broader observation, McMichael (cited in Robinson, 2004) reminds us that the World Bank shifted in the 1980s from project loans to policy loans, a step aimed at restructuring local economies and integrating them into the global economy. In addition, it must be noted that supranational organizations today are staffed by transnational functionaries who work with their transnational counterparts in the increasingly dependent national states. As the transnational cadre links with each other across countries, local state practices become increasingly harmonized with global capitalism (Robinson, 2004).

NGOs. There is great variety among NGOs in form, objectives, and performance. Opportunistic NGOs have emerged over time, and some observers critical of these NGOs complain that they have no accountability. On the other hand, there are many NGOs that are transformative and have had a discernable positive impact on society. At times acting as surrogate social service providers and at others as conceptualizers of new visions of society, these NGOs function as political change agents and contribute to the spread and strengthening of civil society.

Social movements are recognized as crucial elements in initiating and supporting social change. What is sometimes forgotten is that NGOs are the *organizational* forms through which social movements function. Thus, NGOs have played major roles in providing knowledge in response to major needs not covered by the state – on land, HIV/AIDs, and domestic violence, to name

a few – due to the privatization of basic services and to the lack of state response to major problems. NGOs have been active in adult education, offering non-formal education and providing *informal* learning. NGOs have also been active in the provision of formal schooling through the creation of rural schools, particularly in countries where the supply of public schools is very limited, such as in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Adult education provided by NGOs has had a major role in helping transformational movements for women, for Blacks in apartheid society, and for oppressed groups in colonial societies. These adult education efforts were guided by the spirit of collaboration and solidarity, not competition. Feminist NGOs are simultaneously educational and political forces and have tended to focus on three areas of work: human rights, citizenship, and empowerment – distinct yet mutually supportive elements. Feminist NGOs have been extremely important in reducing the negative impacts of globalization by pressing governments to retain their social welfare obligations. Many of these NGOs have not worked in areas connected to formal schooling, but their work on adult women has led to important action regarding the social, economic, and political rights of women – which, of course, has an impact on women’s identities.

In these times of increasingly centralized control of the school curriculum through accountability measures that are heavily dependent on student testing, work with adults constitutes one of the few spaces both for a wider conception of accountability and for liberatory action. The connection between working class aspirations, civil society, and popular education is being currently weakened by globalization trends (Rubenson, 2004). Therefore, all the more need for targeting adult and popular education for alternative knowledge and methodologies that foster agency. To be sure, agency is not an inherent quality of particular entities, but some promote it more than others. Unfortunately, during these times of globalization, support for NGOs is declining, particularly support for women NGOs. Funding agencies usually favour support of short-term training on such issues as health, family planning, and income generation and, while this knowledge is important, it is no substitute for knowledge that leads to contestatory action. Italian thinker Gramsci believed it is unrealistic to look to schools for a radical, counter-hegemonic education. In his view, “the burden of such an enterprise lies squarely in institutions for adult education, especially in those political associations dedicated to social change and in economic associations where workers are involved in productive relationships that have their own educational imperatives” (cited in Entwistle, 1979, p.176).

Emergent social policies

With economic and technological globalization a new kind of state, one more aware of social distinctions and needs, is emerging. Advances in the area of human rights, through international conferences and conventions, are rendering democratic concepts not only acceptable but inevitable. Some victories, although little noticed, are of great significance. For instance, the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted by the UN in 1965, had defined discrimination as: “any distinction, restriction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin that aims at or results in eliminating or undermining the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental liberties in equal conditions in the economic, social or cultural spheres of public life”. However complete this definition was, it was also gender-blind. It was modified to include gender through Recommendation No.25 to ICERD in the year 2000, thanks to vigorous pressure by the women’s movement. In addition to the regular holding of World Social Forums, which congregate thousands of progressive thinkers who can envision alternative realities, similar meetings are being held at regional levels. The First Social Forum of the Americas was held in Quito, Ecuador, in July 2004. It was attended by 10 000 persons, from 814 organizations and 44 countries. It took positions against neoliberal economic policies, intellectual property regulations, and free trade agreements. These massive meetings build a transnational citizenship focused on gender and race equality.

At the same time, we are encountering a state that has much less power than in the past. External agencies and groups are able to exert pressure on the state to modify its governance priorities. The enormous role that foreign direct investment has today as the key means for national development signals unquestioned attention to the private sector and to the production of goods and services rather than a wider framing of social problems and solutions. With a growing segment of weak workers and excluded adults, who are also unable to benefit significantly from the increased production of goods and services, it is unlikely that an altruistic reasoning oriented to equality and social justice may emerge. And yet, we must remember that it was the explicit pact between labour and capital that gave solid support to the establishment of democratic regimes in the twentieth century.

Social policies today are not used as an instrument of social change. What we find instead throughout the world are specific programmes targeted at extreme

poverty. These programmes tend to be unidimensional: food support, monetary transfers to extremely poor families, emergency jobs, or childcare in poor communities. Focalized projects for women aim at helping only the most disadvantaged groups of women, giving them direct assistance in basic needs (nutrition, health posts, water and sewage, electricity, roads, small irrigation works). These projects attend to basic and survival needs; they do not foster empowerment. They function at local levels but with narrow parameters set in central ministries. Given the characteristics of these programmes, it is very unlikely that the social inequality due to income differentials, let alone wealth differentials, may be significantly curtailed.

Countries need to go beyond civic and political citizenship to provide social citizenship: access to employment; a decent salary; health services; provisions in case of unemployment and disability; public education of high quality; equality of opportunity without gender or race discrimination; and prompt and fair justice. In some countries, with large numbers of landless people, as is the case of South Africa (with 19 million landless out of a population of approximately 42 million in 1995), looking at the question of land reform is urgent and unavoidable if inequalities in wealth are to be modified. And ownership of allocated lands will have to be given regardless of marital status.

The most important set of global policies in effect today are the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were ratified by 189 member countries in September 2000 at the UN Millennium Summit and are endorsed at present by all 191 UN member countries. An important goal of the MDGs (Goal No.3) addresses women's empowerment. While it is certainly a victory for the women's movement to have the concept of empowerment recognized as an important political issue, it must be remarked that empowerment in the global governmental agenda has little to do with women's rights, whether civil, political, economic, or reproductive. This can be ascertained from the four indicators selected to monitor attainment of the empowerment goal:

- the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education;
- the literacy rate among the 15-24 year-old group;
- the proportion of women as non-agricultural workers; and
- the proportion of women as political representatives.

The first indicator assumes that access to formal education will inevitably generate among women assertiveness and critical understanding of their immediate world. The second indicator not only automatically equates literacy

with power, but centres on young women. And the other women? The third indicator assumes, rather erroneously, that the simple presence of women in commercial and industrial sectors of the economy will lead to salaries or status equal to those of men. These assumptions have shortcomings that undermine the goal of empowerment. The fourth indicator comes close to some measure of power as political office signifies women's presence at decision-making locations. According to informal accounts, UNDP – the agency in charge of overseeing MDG implementation – has issued guidelines to countries for the preparation of their national reports that reduce the entire empowerment goals to education enrolment at the three levels. In short, women's empowerment is crucial but has yet to be defined in a way that can indeed significantly transform power relations. Questions of land redistribution, salary comparability, access to credit and technology, and legislative changes to alter inheritance, marriage, and women's right to control their own bodies need to be included.

Shaping the future

This article attempted, on the basis of admittedly incomplete comparative data, to present the wide array of changes affecting education in a rapidly expanding technological and economic globalization process. New practices, dynamics, and rationales shape current individual and collective choices. Several of these changes pinpoint the diffusion of human rights and the endorsement of equal opportunity principles. Others generate considerable inequalities and game rules that render any attention to equity issues, and to gender equity in particular, difficult to sustain. All three levels of education are facing trends of expansion and privatization; quality, however, emerges as a scarce resource, severely diluted by other financial priorities. Higher education is being challenged by narrow productivity criteria that detract from collective and emancipatory efforts. In this context, gender equity, as urgent now as at any time, risks being treated as a marginal concern.

Observing the performance of Latin American governments, Weyland (2004) concludes that they have two distinct constituencies: the domestic citizenry, voters, and interest groups; and the foreign and domestic investors with strong transnational links and often greater influence than the national constituency. Weyland finds that often the two constituencies pull in different directions. Trade unions, which in the past used to be significant social actors, today have fewer members and command lower political influence than before market

reforms. Similar observations can be made of other developing regions of the world. Globalization can be said to be inherently asymmetrical for it generates a two-tier world economy between developing and developed countries, and domestically, between the wealthy and the poor groups.

Foreign investments have become the prime source of energy for national development in the Third World, yet it is also clear that, despite the increasing technological improvements that reduce the need for human labour, investments also require cheap labour and thus follow foremost low wages. They also seek friendly environments in which low taxes, limited ecological constraints, and a stable legal order prevail. Very little viable latitude is left to national governments, and formal education functions as only one variable among others that determine a country's 'competitiveness'.

Regarding education, specifically, it is demonstrable that high levels of education generate high wages. But economic data for many countries show that at medium and low levels of education very low wages are obtained. Education, despite the current rhetoric of access for all, is a social invention characterized by fierce competition among unequal players. Further, as Navia and Velasco contend, "However much politicians may like to talk about a 'crisis in education,' no such thing exists from the perspective of the immediate political costs of not reforming. And reforming these sectors involves large redistributions of income, with the losses being . . . concentrated among relatively few [but powerful] people and sectors" (2003, p.276).²

Given the current political and economic rationales in most developing countries, the possibility of a fundamental alteration of educational provision in favour of disadvantaged classes is remote. It is not surprising, therefore, in these moments of weak state structures and functions, and scarce will by dominant groups to invest in public education, that the prevailing educational discourse expressed by governments masks this situation by making constant reference to quality education. In practice, there exists scant evidence that

² Navia and Velasco go on to explain that in the first-generation reforms – budget cuts, trade and foreign liberalization, state retrenchment, and privatization – the people affected were spread out in the population or too poor to be politically significant. In contrast, the second-generation reforms will go against well organized and influential groups such as teacher and judicial unions, upper echelons of civil servants, state and local governments, owners and managers of private monopolies, and the medical establishment.

states will take action to accomplish this aim. Actual allocation of educational budgets to meet this objective lags considerably. Salaries of teachers, infrastructure of schools, and educational materials are issues constantly postponed.

A gender perspective on ongoing developments complicates this picture. The nature of knowledge and the type of schooling experience are central and they must be altered to promote gender equality. Yet, reality shows that suitable knowledge is not enough either. Public measures are needed that provide equal opportunities for men and women. Legally, both sexes have the same opportunities in terms of formal rights and equal access to benefits in education; actual implementation of these intentions must follow. Women also need access to material benefits – property, credit, access to technology – legal protection against violence, discrimination, sexual harassment, and the right to exercise control over their own bodies. In these areas, public policies are weak and many yet to be enacted.

The resolution of inequalities will have to address multiple dimensions. A four-step sequence is proposed by Kliksberg (2001); the physical wellbeing of the poor and their connection to the environment is a fundamental issue to be addressed. Then comes the question of human capital and the strengthening of public schools. Next, explicit steps must be taken to create social capital: partnerships with like-minded groups, participation in social networks, and the generation of confidence and rules for cooperation between citizens. Finally, steps must be taken to create employment.

A market economy generates a market society, where marketing and individual consumerism prevail. As a result of globalization, we are facing a state of crisis in which concerns of social justice, including the imbalance of gender in society and the means to correct it, are simply not in the public policy agenda. What is to be done then? What paths provide the capacity to counter current trends?

To decide on common objectives in any society, it is crucial to create shared experiences and agreed cultural meanings. But how does one create them? Measures such as a common educational experience (preferably a single public school system), intercultural understanding including learning the language of the ‘Other’, a supportive mass media, wide communication and dissemination of information (a role in which the Internet is already important), and voting rights according to residential density loom promising.

The private/public divide in most educational systems will not help. But there exists the possibility of introducing critical pedagogies in public schools through the presence of organic intellectuals. These educators more likely will be formed through nongovernmental group initiatives rather than by public teacher training institutions or teacher unions. These educators are also more likely to come from university programmes led by progressive academicians. Since alternative and emancipatory measures will not be initiated by weak governments, it is up to civil society to engage in them. To do so with minimal funding in a social context that challenges solidarity is the democratic challenge of the twenty-first century.

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