

The impact of globalisation for children



Introduction

There are varying definitions of globalisation as it spans across a wide spectrum affecting many aspects of our lives. For this paper, it will focus on evaluating the inferred consequences of globalisation on children and families including poverty, economic growth, political organisations, migration and displacements, inequality, climate change and cultural influence.

The challenges faced by children and families are onerous. Whatever the implications and effects, children are most vulnerable. Their lives depend on what we do for them in this age of globalisation. They are our future and how we deal with the various components of globalisation, will affect the future.

Political

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989, acts as a paramount umbrella that sets minimum standards for governments to uphold children's rights to basic needs, healthcare, education, legal and social services in their countries.

Currently organisations such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank, World Health Organisation (WHO) and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) support developing countries with infrastructural and financial assistance to alleviate poverty and provide care and education to under developing children. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) support developed countries in investing into building human and social capital to increase skills and knowledge to tackle famine.

While governments in developed countries take a pro-active role in promoting and establishing national frameworks in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), these services are operated by private entrepreneurs in developing countries. Equity and accessibility becomes questionable as political alliances between countries and organisations set their own agendas marginalising resource poor countries.

For instance, the World Bank, with the US as its biggest investor, works with private corporations serving the interests of rich nations by exploiting the cheap labour and resources from the developing countries. Funds could be better used to assist in raising the standard of living and improve the lives of families and children in poor and developing countries.

Economic

Economic growth is pivotal to lifting people above the basic sustenance level in developing countries. But focus on economic growth alone does not reduce poverty. Save The Children, 2010, argues that “ without a more nuanced discussion on the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction, children will not fully gain from the potential benefits of growth.”

Unequal distribution of wealth and benefits is hampering the banishment of poverty. Policies that favour labour intensive industries such as agriculture and small enterprises have a greater effect on poverty than growth in the financial services.

Money may be flooding into the country but only to a select few stand to gain. In terms of child mortality and combating under-nutrition, countries

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that record moderate economic growth fare the best; those with poor growth had worse results; but surprisingly, countries with outstanding rate of growth did not fare very well (Gabriele and Schettino, 2007).

Recent statistics released estimated over 40% reductions in global under-five mortality rate since 1990 (IGME, 2012). Notwithstanding a higher indicator of life chances for children across the globe, the continual widening income gap will cause a reversal in the current improvement of mortality rate.

Policies should target specific elements of pro-poor growth strategies that promote equality, redistribution and eradication of poverty. Ultimately, it is the improvement of the quality of life for the poor that matters; where children are given their rightful place in education, child growth, health and opportunities to further their future.

Climate Change

Climate change has been identified as the biggest global health threat to children in the 21st century (Save the Children, 2009). The Greenhouse effects largely caused by human activities are now experienced by countries throughout the world. The impact made by climate change on food security, healthcare, clean water supply and livelihoods has a profound influence on urbanisation, migration, poverty and armed conflict.

Climate change affects national healthcare budgets. Less developed countries already buffeted by the disintegration of healthcare services and infrastructure; grapple with any crippling effects of climate change affecting the economy.

The sum effect put children and their families at greatest risk. Children under 5 years are most vulnerable to its consequences. Poor families could be pushed into the deeper end of their troubles bringing about long term consequences on their children's survival.

Millions of children in affected areas suffer from malnutrition and babies are born malnourished and/or with anomalies. For example, children from the poorest 20% of households in many developing countries have up to 5 times the mortality rate of children from the richest 20% households (DHS, 2009).

Migration and Displacement

Globally, there is an increase in economic migration driven by income disparities, exploitation, and demand for labour. Mass migration leads to growing urbanisation because it is perceived to offer more stability for people who come from agricultural and natural resource-based livelihoods.

It is estimated that millions of urban-dwellers in low and middle income countries are living in poverty with lack of access to clean water and decent sanitation (UN-Habitat, 2003). Slums and overcrowding plague many cities where poorly constructed homes and densely populated areas pose greater risks of fires, disease outbreaks and disasters endangering many children.

Millions, both poor and affluent, could be displaced by the next 40 to 50 years due to climate change. While most will move within their own countries, many will also cross international borders (UNFCCC, 2008).

A research by Save the Children, 2008, found that children tend to move independently or with their parents due to war, natural disasters or to

support their families. Moving alone to escape from poverty, exploitation, calamities, pursuing better educational or job opportunities can pose grave dangers for children as they face the risk of exploitation and abuse.

The influx of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to any given country threatens the local infrastructure as it leads to competitive scrambling of health, education and shelter resources which will have serious impact on child survival.

Inequality and Social Injustice

The richest 5% people in the world receive 114 times the income of the poorest 5% population (Kirby, 2006). The globalisation trend of widening income gap is altering the structures of families, economies and society. Such persistent disparity would result in dire consequences for families and their children in terms of security and social stability. Compared to the poor, children and families from affluent households have better access to healthcare, education, legal and social services.

Gender inequality is prevalent in most patriarchal societies. If one gender is considered more economically and socially viable than another, resources would be unequally distributed. Access to services is limited for women and girls in societies where the male gender receives preferential treatment.

Globalisation is creating a ballooning underclass that is struggling due to growing income gaps and lack of job opportunities. This presents an ideal environment for international criminal syndicates who are spreading cancerous crimes that exploit and victimise women and children e. g. drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal trade.

Shift in Family Structure

Globalisation has reshaped family structures into a more diverse profile. It has altered the roles of parents, women, family structure, and child rearing practices.

Today, the traditional role of women as caregivers can be assumed by fathers, extended families, guardians and domestic helps.

As more women join the workforce, demand for early childhood services increases provided they are accessible, affordable and of quality. In most patriarchal societies, expectations of child rearing remain the mainstay of women while work, whether formal or informal, adds to their burden.

The worldwide trend in increasing divorce rates is pushing the likelihood of single parenthood (usually headed by a woman) as an alternative viable lifestyle in developed and developing countries.

Cultural Globalisation

Mass migration further extends the perimeters of diversity in multicultural societies. Adjustment to new cultural framework causes transitional disequilibrium from set beliefs to new influences.

Culture is transient. Throughout history, the retention, evolution or desertion of personal beliefs were outcomes of exchanges, religious conversions, conquests and colonisation. Cultural beliefs and practices affect family structure and function as well as children's sense of identity and belonging.

In many Asian and sub-Saharan societies, collective mentality is the prevalent social perspective; placing others before self. Child rearing is

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viewed as a shared responsibility within the interdependent community and such notion deters individualism. Western child rearing philosophies promotes individualism. The exposure of Western influences has not threatened the existence of indigenous cultures but its assimilation may be deemed beneficial.

Media and Technology

Globalisation facilitates cultural imperialism where the export of movies and music, particularly from the West, has widespread influence in the world. The advent of the internet extends the influence to a far wider reach exposing children to a myriad range of content which can be beneficial or detrimental.

Consumer technology is another effect of globalisation. Computers and mobile phones have become an integral part of our lives especially in the affluent societies. Children today are much more conversant with technology. However, over-dependence and overuse of such devices by children could compromise their interactive and inter-personal skills development.

The media coupled with technology are influential in shaping values, beliefs and lifestyle.

Other Risk Factors

AIDS today is a worldwide problem and globalisation has played no small part in the spread of this disease. Numbers are growing in Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. AIDS through heterosexual transmission is prevalent in Africa. Globalisation through geographical mobility extends the spread of the HIV. Women and children with HIV in

developing countries are ostracised from the community usually without or with little medical help.

Wars not only destroy lives but have detrimental effects on children.

Reduced food supply contributes to the lack of nutrition for children.

Healthcare becomes scarce as priorities are diverted, for example, money spent on arms instead of vaccinations. Education opportunities are reduced in times of war. Children are separated from their families through death and evacuation usually leading to their abandonment.

Conclusion

The effects of globalisation affecting families and children are long term and far-reaching. The many issues raised merely highlights the complexities and never-ending debate as to what measures are needed and how they can be implemented for the improvement in quality of life and proper raising of children with the provision of at least the basic necessities.

On the macro level, governments and international organisations with vast resources at their disposal, should question their commitment to help. They can certainly do more by putting aside differences, biasness and ulterior motives. Schools, service providers, parents and caregivers should continue to fulfil their responsibilities in making the best effort in the upbringing of children regardless of cultural bias and work demands.