COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RESPONSES IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st Century, the process of globalization continues at a rapid pace, fuelled by improvements in information and communication technology and infrastructure. Very little of what happens in the world is a local event and there is constant interaction between the global and the local. Globalization has also led to a number of complex transnational problems, such as climate change and the global financial crisis, problems that impact most heavily on marginalized communities and individuals in society. Communities have struggled over centuries about the way to allocate resources within society and how to live in harmony with each other. Those who have resources have power over others. This power can be used often to exclude others and to setup structures that perpetuate oppression in society. Privileged positions in society and within communities are only sustained because significant sectors of society carry the burden or bear the damages. The current changes in society have had enormous impact on communities and have caused a great level of social unease and restructuring. Community workers and activists have had to manage the impact of this crisis in many circumstances. This paper examines the impact of global changes on communities at a macro level and their implications for community organising and community development.

Keywords: Community Development, Neoliberal Globalization, Power.

GLOBALIZATION

The second half of the 20th Century and the first decade of the 21st Century have involved increased extensions of global networks, intensity of global interconnectedness, the velocity of global flows as well as the impact propensity of global interconnectedness involving a multiplicity of actors and flows, a process commonly referred to as Globalization (Appadurai, 1990; Voutira & Dona, 2007). This relatively benign view of globalization is challenged by a number of scholars who see globalization as a reshaping of the world
and society on global economic principles (Beck, 2000; Eastmond, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2001; N. Gopalkrishnan, 2003; Heron, 2008), one that is guided by neoliberal ideology that emphasizes the primacy of the free market and its ability to respond effectively to social problems. This view of globalization is frequently termed neoliberal globalization. The extent that this extends across the globe is greatly facilitated by information and communication technology and infrastructure that enable the increasing speeds and volumes of transactions across the world as well (Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012). Further, Multilateral Economic Institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade organization provide an ad hoc system of global governance for neoliberal globalization that completely lacks democratic accountability and tends to support the interests of the rich (N. Gopalkrishnan, 2001; Holland & Cook, 1983, p. 204).

Another issue with neoliberal globalization is that inequity in its institutional arrangements also ensures that the economic benefits that flow from it are divided very unequally (Bargal & Schmid, 1993), with the top 20 per cent of the world’s population accumulating 86 percent of the wealth as against the lowest 20 per cent with only 1.3 per cent of the total wealth (Shera & Page, 1996).

The key features of neoliberal globalization can be summarized as:

- Social, political and economic events in one region of the world have direct, often immediate and sometimes lasting impacts in other parts of the world,

- International social, political and economic forces are the drivers of the dynamics of human degradation and social injustice found in local communities, and they combine to sustain social inequalities in particular locales,

- Cultural diffusion and rapprochement are contradicted by increasingly nationalist tendencies in many different countries:

- Social relations that shape all aspects of life by giving primacy to market mechanisms and discipline;

- Migration as a response to economic hardship, environmental degradation and violence;

- Rapid technological change that has introduced new forms of exclusion, e.g. the digital divide;

- Urbanization and centralization that stress environmental capacities to support ever rising population numbers. (Dominelli, 2010; Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994, p. 601; Trethewey, 1997, p. 3)

It can be argued that neoliberal globalization exacerbates the scale and severity of already existing social problems such as poverty, hunger, ill health and unemployment.
and incorporates new elements of risk in such as in the area of natural disasters caused by climate change (Beck, 2000; Sugarman, 1989; Webster & Watson, 2002). Transformation in the economic maps of the world is also reflected in transformations in the pressures on the environment with the income-poor, less industrialized countries of the Global South coming off a poor second to the income-rich, highly industrialized countries of the Global North (McDonald, 1999). Much of the environmental pressure of economic growth is concentrated by manufacturing in poorer nations while richer nations continue to maintain their environments with less polluting industries. However, it must be noted here that these risks are increasingly being spread across countries through global processes such as migration and economic interdependence (McDonald, 1999; Wernet & Austin, 1991). Poverty itself is becoming global in the form of drugs, diseases, pollution, migration, terrorism and political instability (Hasenfeld, 1980). There are a number of issues that transcend the boundaries of nation-states including environmental changes, global warming, world hunger, population growth, and external debt to name a few (Eastmond, 2007).

These processes of globalization can impact on the nation-state in a number of ways. It involves a withdrawal of the Welfare State from many of its traditional roles as well as a diminishing of the mixed economy. It accelerates the process of ‘de-stating’, where the state withdraws from many of its traditional activities in the market place and places increasing emphasis on reducing public spending and provision of welfare (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). This also leaves the state less able to ameliorate the worst impacts of globalization on marginalized communities (Shera & Page, 1996). The state is also less able to resist the pressures of large international corporate organizations, leading to situations that benefit the interests of the powerful in society as against the weaker sections of the society. The traditional support systems that existed in the extended family and the community are also weakened or demolished by the fluid interactions of global forces, further increasing the vulnerability of large sections of the population (Dona, 2007). Ledwith (2001) further argues that the impacts of neoliberal processes are both gendered and racist, in that they impact most heavily on women, especially those from marginalized groups like the African American community in the United States. The United Nations (Hasenfeld, 1980) speaks about this negative impact on women in terms of the neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programs imposed on many countries of the Global South, stating that their net impact has been to reduce even further
women’s access to entitlements needed to sustain minimal well-being.

On the positive side, there is evidence to show that the benefits of neoliberal globalization can flow through to the poorer countries and poorer communities, such as with the commonly presented examples of India and China, but even this is subject to major institutional reforms and changes to governance structures (Wernet & Austin, 1991). The anti-neoliberal globalization movements are also a product of globalization and represent new opportunities for positive change (Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012). Globalization does provide a number of opportunities for transformation through global human interaction supported by technology and infrastructure (Bargal & Schmid, 1993) which can have positive implications for society, even providing new avenues to combat many of the negative impacts of neoliberal globalization through macro community and social development interventions (Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012; Jones, 2006; Stein, 1981).

COMMUNITY WORK

Approaches, such as community work or community development, incorporating ideas of empowerment, advocacy and anti-oppressive practice can prove critical in terms of enabling workers and communities to relate effectively to a globalized world (Lymbery, 2001). Community development is described by Kenny (2011, p. 17) as ‘born out of a commitment to practicing ways of empowering people to take collective control of their own lives’. She further suggests that community development requires profound changes in the ways in which societies are organized and has held out the promise of heroic change.

Community development approaches provide opportunities for workers to engage constructively in the promotion of social justice by going beyond individual case work interventions to working with social issues and needs (Mendes 2009). As Mizrahi (2001, p. 24) argues in the context of social work, ‘…. workers trained in macro intervention methods are needed to help promote and implement systemic change on behalf of vulnerable populations disempowered by the market economy’.

However, community work and community development remain contested fields, as we experience social, political and economic change at the global level (Gopalkrishnan, 2003). Neoliberal globalization has impacted adversely on many marginalised groups and communities across the world (Gopalkrishnan, 2001). The concept of social welfare and the resources available to it are being much more narrowly defined also leading to increasing marginalisation (Kenny, 2011).
There have been a number of community work responses to these changes (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). While some efforts have been put into managing the impact of changes at the local level, others have been to look at coalition building and developing social movements nationally. However, community workers continue to struggle with relating the issues in their community with that of the broader national and international contexts or have been constrained by the organisations they have worked for, often due to the funding conditions being imposed on them (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006).

While some authors like Midgley (2001) suggest that the increasing criticism has led to an increasing adoption of community development approaches, particularly in countries of the Global South, much of the literature suggests that these approaches continue to be those least utilized by professionals (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Kaufman, Huss, & Segal-Engelchin, 2011). Despite the need for developmental work as a response to burgeoning issues in communities, both in the Global North and the Global South, the emphasis on community and social development actually appears to have reduced in the wake of neoliberal globalization (Napier & George, 2001). Fisher and Corciullo (2011) suggest that the reason for this decline is that in more politically conservative contexts, such as since 1980 in the United States, workers have tended to turn away from macro issues towards a focus on the individual.

CHALLENGES, THEMES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

From the above complex realities facing our societies a number of challenges and themes emerge which communities and those working with communities have to come to terms with, and use towards the benefit of the communities (Kenny, 2011; Mulgan, 1997)) and some of the themes that emerge are discussed in this section.

Mulgan (1997) argues that there is a slow shift in goals away from quantity towards quality. Economic growth and distribution of welfare defined in economic terms is not enough. He argues that it is not enough simply to accumulate more. There is abundance of evidence that economic growth on its own does not necessarily translate into a better quality of life, welfare or happiness. Community workers need to work towards the recognition of the limits to globalisation. Although globalisation is stretching the fabric of daily life and remaking political relations and of locality beyond anything known in the past it provides a backdrop about how different systems interconnect: industries, environments, educational
and political systems (Appadurai, 1990; Bowles, 2005). This can provide a basis for rigorous analysis and allow for ideas to be open and new partnerships to be forged.

The limits of economic theory as a mechanism for decision making are being reconsidered in the face of environmental and social forces. This provides opportunities for better quality of life and solutions which are not just local but global in nature and incorporate ideas of environmental sustainability with those of social justice (Gopalkrishnan, 2011). A change is required towards a value orientation and a redistribution of wealth and resources not just within but between nations. A shift in paradigm from ‘having’ to ‘being’ needs to occur. This can only be achieved through more informed and participatory politics and processes (Eversole, 2012). This is where the opportunities lie for strategic partnerships and a holistic approach to society. Community workers are often being called on to manage the process of economic change. The task at hand is not just to help people adjust to insecurity and fragmentation in their lives but to look at wealth redistribution and a more just society (Beck, 2000).

Neoliberal globalization and international conservative pressures have caused a shift in the focus of community development from empowerment based community approaches to resource management and accommodative forms of active citizenship (Kenny 2011). Programs such as ‘neighbourhood renewal’ are forms of community development that maintain the status quo rather than challenge systems and work towards constructive change (Mendes 2009). There is a need for community development approaches to return to the basics of bottom-up and empowerment-based approaches. This involves the adoption of methods and processes that place development in local communities and involves an active citizenry that defends, looks out for and advocates on behalf of the community, especially those that are marginalized within the community (Kenny 2011). At another level, these approaches also need to incorporate the paradigm of international development that works toward dealing with the issues raised by the processes of neoliberal globalization through international collaboration and action. The choice here is enunciated by Dominelli (2010, p. 8) as ‘to continue with oppressive forms of practice that impoverish people rather than help them or become allies in the endeavour to create liberating forms of practice that affirm people’s rights and redistribute power, goods and services across the globe’.

Another theme is diversity. Most of the political and institutional traditions are based on assumptions of homogeneity. However, the idea that
there is a single public, community, nation or generalising the experiences of one class (e.g. working class) no longer holds good (Makuwira, 2007). Diversity, while there may be resistance to it, is a fact of life—there is no longer a single language, single set of values or single ethnic mix. Diversity, along the lines of ethnicity, race, sexuality and ability, is posing new challenges (Maccio & Doueck, 2003; Robson & Spence, 2011). Certain groups forced by marginalisation within their environment forge alliances with other groups and traditional loyalties and alliances are often altered (Burchill, Higgins, Ramsamy, & Taylor, 2006). For example, in Australia some conservative politicians take very progressive stances in relation to race issues, contrary to the views of their political parties. This potential for new forms of organising brings new dimensions and can offer strategic partnerships for social progress. The inherent danger maybe what compromises one may be forced to make. Regardless of the challenges, community work needs to pay greater attention to diversity issues, especially ethnic and racial diversity.

An additional dimension of diversity is inter-communal conflict which characterises much of the world (N. Gopalkrishnan, 2013) and community development can have a major role to play in this context. As an example, community workers are already engaged with refugees who are often displaced by conflict, engaged in their resettlement, in raising awareness of struggles around the world and in ensuring material support for refugees. An argument can be made that work based on diversity can lead to further conflict but Barnes and Mercer (1995) argue that community development can retain a non-divisive and internationalist perspective if it is based on respect for human dignity, diversity, and recognition of the support needed by oppressed minorities. Partnerships with agencies at an international level need to be strengthened, particularly on issues of oppression of minorities and human rights. The dysfunctional nature of the United Nations and its control by a few powerful nations necessitates the building of alternatives and developing existing ones such as Amnesty International, Minority Rights Group and Human Rights Watch.

The state is still a contested terrain where much of the struggle occurs—struggle for resources, power and justice (Gopalkrishnan, 2005). Governments, as they are currently organised, are controlled by powerful economic entities (Beck, 2007). If the state is to become either fairer in any way, it has to be much more open, democratic and participatory. As the role of the state is questioned, and in the face of global demands, there is great potential for a reshaping of
the state and for increasing partnerships between communities and government to work together on social problems (Gary Craig, Mayo, & Taylor, 2000; Dominelli, 2010). Community workers currently engage with the state in a number of ways, in both confrontational and also collaborative ways (Hoatson, 2001). One key challenge for partnerships with the state is for community based agencies or non-government organisations to work with communities to voice their own need rather than work toward meeting a need that is defined by others, often the government (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006; Smith, Rochester, & Nessey, 1995).

Learning is critical in the new era. Information and knowledge is the primary base of the economy even though the knowledge may be vocational and skills oriented (Appadurai, 1990). There is little emphasis on learning about society especially in the context of history and continuity. A key area of social development and holistic approach to society is the continuity of the past and the present, not only in the narrow sense of the word ‘culture’ but including history. The pace of life, the rapid movement of events in our lives are often without linkage. Knowing history and making the connections is a key part of community development (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). This knowledge is not always available in the mainstream media and can only be passed through alternative information and in networking between sectors of the community. Some of the connecting can be in the form of ‘virtual communities’ through technology such as the Internet (Holmes, 1997). The challenges for community work in terms of education are great and there is a need for a more broad based approach to knowledge and resistance.

Gender is an important theme for the future. The last century witnessed them a movement of women into the workplace which has represented an economic shift and a cultural shift. Women’s ways of operating, managing and coping are gaining prominence in the spheres of public and private life (Dominelli, 2006). The relations between men and women, between public and private and between families and industries are being renegotiated. A number of writers have pointed to the issues facing the identity of men in contemporary society as women demand equality (Pease, 1999). Community work is faced with challenges in helping communities negotiate these roles, definitions of masculinity and femininity and to shape society in which gender injustice is reduced (Robson & Spence, 2011).

Having achieved so-called individual freedom, especially in Western societies, there is now a realization of the need to move away from
individualist standpoints to more collective ways of working and doing (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). Community work faces the challenge of changing mindsets to look at individual and collective responsibility and to examine the linkages between the whole and the parts (Gary Craig et al., 2000). This means beginning to examine interconnectedness and interdependence between the various roles individuals play such as parents, citizens, and consumers (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). These connections are vital in understanding our roles as individuals and where we ‘fit in’ and how we can take control of factors which impact on our lives and society.

Participation, citizenship rights and the notion of democracy are being challenged. In many countries there is a complete disillusionment with the electoral and democratic processes (Babacan, 2008). The struggle for citizenship or social rights has become a must to secure means of survival for many individuals or groups (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). The situational positions of different sections of society and of minorities are often ignored in mainstreaming and genuine participation is prevented in the process. Social justice must be about social rights, entrenched as citizenship rights. Arnstein points out that participation is not easy to achieve and involves a transfer of power. She states: “That citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future” (1971, pp. 71-72).

Participation can serve a developmental function and an instrumental function. Developmentally, it can raise individuals’ awareness, confidence and esteem to be able to act and to make a difference. It can bring together people and establish a sense of belonging and community. Instrumentally, it can result in the action to resist or encourage change (Dalton, 1996).

Time and the impact of technologies are important considerations. Time has become visible as a resource, something to be conserved and used well. We are becoming aware of the timeframes in which we operate. The two dominant decision making processes are elections and the consumer market, which are both very short term and driven by the interests of a few. Technologies accelerate the decision making process and the rate at which things become obsolete very fast (Appadurai, 1990). This further limits the opportunity to impact on the decision making process and assists in clouding power imbalances in society through a massive influx of information, change and reaction.
Often the majority of communities ‘consent’ to these systems through what Gramsci calls *hegemony* (Ledwith, 2001). Yet all societies depend on a capacity to act in the long term interest which may last longer and these short-term decision making processes need considerable challenge from community work. While technologies pose a major challenge they also offer some potential. There is a higher level of communication made possible by information technology and greater travel potential. The technologies can be utilised to gain greater understanding of what other people are doing about their oppressive situations. For example in the 1998 strike at ports in Queensland, the trade union at the centre of the dispute was able to obtain support from international unions and trace the owners of the ships through the Internet. Other marginalised groups are able to bring their issues before international audiences such as indigenous people and the environment movement. A level of greater organisation and partnerships are possible at an unprecedented scale. Much more effort needs to be put into supporting structures and organisations that work at the global level in the areas of human rights, workers’ rights, economic sustainability and the environment.

Finally there is the issue of *trust*. There is a crisis in trust in governments, central institutions of society and in processes. Societal success depends on trust, on people’s capacity to shape their world and to work with others. Networks are emerging which are often based on certain interests and when no longer there, the network disappears. In community work practice, it is often the funded worker which holds groups together, and trust is a key part of collaboration and participation (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006; Kenny, 2011). The challenge is to build communities, structures and systems which individuals and groups trust, be a part of and own, regardless of what funding is available to it.

**WAYS FORWARD**

Globalization based on neoliberalism is a fact of life in the 21st century. While it provides unique opportunities for human achievement on the one hand, on the other it is causing enormous pressures on the environment as well as on the poor and the marginalized communities across the world. The negative impacts of neoliberal globalization are further exacerbated as nation-states are increasingly withdrawing from their traditional roles that enabled them to buffer vulnerable sections of society. In this context, communities and workers have a very significant role to play in responding effectively to the global issues as well as dealing with their local impacts. Although the social, political and economic
landscape of the world is changing it is not all negative. The changing environments offer opportunities for justice and sustainability.

The processes of neoliberal globalization offer niches not only for capital and goods but also for human potential to develop. This is where the concept of ‘globalisation from below’ is useful involving community development at an international level which refutes the primacy of the economic agenda, the supremacy of free markets and competition but rather focuses on social justice values, human rights and sustainable environments and communities (Craig, 1998). It involves establishing a clear global agenda with global structures but with the initiative of ordinary people. This requires an analysis of local and national contexts in the light of global issues and the ability to transcend the assumptions of national community work practice and policy.

It is crucial to make the connections across countries of the nature and cause of social problems or issues which seem only pertinent to localised situations. It also involves the need to promote an international consciousness which can lead to international forms of organisation and community work practice. There is a need for strong partnerships between community development organisations. It is of utmost importance that structures are created which enable the disadvantaged or marginalised sectors of the community to participate directly. The responsibility to work on strategic partnership building falls on us all.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


