

**The Ethical and Cultural Implications of the New
Communication Technologies in Globalization**

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Overview

Globalization and the information revolution are turning out to be a double-sided sword: one side revealing great opportunities for international integration, increased cooperation among nation states, and the eradication of poverty on a world-wide scale. On the other side, they are seen as threats to cultural diversity, precipitators of environmental degradation, and contributors to the marginalization of vulnerable minorities which are not connected to the global economy and the information network. Supporters of globalization, and those who are its opponents, have made ethical claims to support their respective positions.

This essay is an attempt to examine the ethical and cultural implications that attend globalization with its key constituent, the new communication technologies; and to assess their impact on cultures that are involved in the process.

Globalization, as a phenomenon of the latter part of the twentieth century and facilitated in large part by the new communication technologies, is a complex one.. The information revolution that has been taking place in the past few decades has expanded, accelerated and extended the globalization process. The communication technologies that have been invented in the latter part of the twentieth century have rapidly changed the way people communicate with each other and conduct business with one another. Among the new technologies, the Internet is considered to be the most significant instrument. Dubbed as the centerpiece of the new communication technologies, it is widely regarded as the key in the globalization process. Because it has become such a powerful instrument in all aspects of our daily existence, there is a need to examine the ethical and cultural aspects in its development and applications.

Globalization Defined

Globalization is not a new invention. From a historical perspective, it had its start with contacts brought about by commercial activities with the establishment of the ancient Silk Route between Europe and Asia, and the voyages by sea in search of the Spice islands by sea-faring Europeans. These were followed by the spread of major religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism and the conversions of "heathen" in foreign lands, accompanied by or followed by colonization of the "new world" by the major

powers of the time such as Spain, Portugal, The United Kingdom, France, and Belgium and which took place from the 15th to the 19th centuries.

However, the concept of globalization as we know it today is definitely new and different. The years following World War II, were periods of increased contact, international exchanges and interdependencies among economically developed and some developing countries. That period also marked the establishment of supra-national organization which administered programs designed to “develop” and “modernize” nations. “Development” and “modernization” became the catch phrases of the time to describe the processes of change that were taking place or about to take place in various countries of the world.

In the years that followed, the world has witnessed an unprecedented technological revolution in information technology and transportation. These occurrences led to the rise of a global economy, communication networks and intensified intercultural exchanges. These developments were collectively termed “globalization.” Globalization has become a metaphor for the times, marking the advent of free trade and a world-wide information network leading to a new kind of world order.

But, despite its history of success, or because of it, globalization has become one of the most contentious issues in public discourse within the past decade. Over the years, globalization has acquired an emotional overtone because of its perceived pervasive inequities and the hegemonic aspects of the global marketplace.

In the past few years, we have witnessed an increasing number of violent protests at places where leaders of the world’s richest nations, known by its acronym (G-8) meet to discuss issues of common interest, or where officials representing supra-national organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization hold their meetings and conferences. The demonstrations are organized by disparate groups and organizations who are united in their belief that globalization is a threat to human rights and national sovereignty, and a danger to the environment. Violent and nonviolent protests are now commonplace in areas where these organizations meet. We have witnessed such events in places like Seattle, Acapulco, Genoa, Davos and Doha to name a few among the most violent ones. Demonstrations have been threatened to take place during subsequent meetings of the G-8 and other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). Because of these threats some meetings which

were scheduled to take place such as those sponsored by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been cancelled .

Surprisingly, despite the controversial nature of globalization, there does not seem to appear any consensus about what it actually means. Instead, the concept has been defined in widely divergent ways depending upon the context of the situation , the particular participants, or the organizations involved.

For the purposes of this paper, I will take the position that *globalization is the forging of a multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between nation states, societies and cultures which make up the modern international arena, supported by a large array of information technology.*

Communication Technologies and the Internet

Information technology and globalization are so intertwined that one can't speak of one without implying the other. Information technology is defined here as the "computer based activities that derive from the convergence of micro-electronics, computing and telecommunications. ' The new technologies have completely changed the way business is being conducted internationally in terms of production, dissemination, retrieval and storage of information. They have also re-defined the role of media, media's accessibility and its ownership and/or control. As a consequence, information has become more of a commodity rather than as common property.

The new communication technologies that have become useful for trade and other purposes include cellular phones, new communication networks (high capacity consumer networks, banking networks), FAX machines, fiber optic cables, palm pilots, i-pods, blackberries , communication satellites and other derivative inventions which continue to develop, even as I speak. These technologies have allowed businesses to expand at a rapid rate, to cross boundaries of time and space and to facilitate the impact of interconnectedness among nations, cultures and peoples. The rapid proliferation and commercial potential of the new technologies have resulted in the effective commercialization and commodification of cyberspace (Dahl, 1998)

The Internet

Of the array of new communication technologies that have been invented, the Internet is

currently one of the most successful. Dubbed as the defining technology of the information age, it has drawn praises and controversies in its applications. In its relationship to globalization, the Internet has become its major component and is widely recognized as the key driver in the globalization process.

The Internet has made possible the speedy flow of information worldwide, which has enabled the lesser-developed countries connected to the web, to obtain vital information that they need to accelerate their development. It enables these countries to be in constant contact with development agencies and international lending institutions and receive instant feedback and much needed aid and counsel.

It's been only a little over a decade ago that the Internet began its dynamic spread worldwide, providing nations and cultures new opportunities to interact in innovative and far reaching ways. It is no longer necessary to stay up late at night to send a message that would be received early the next day at the other side of the world and then wait for sometime for a reply. It is now possible to schedule "conference calls" with one's counterparts in other parts of the world without having to pay exorbitant fees. One can join "chat rooms" or discussion groups without ever having face to face contact with the person(s) on the other side of a discussion. Newer developments include social networks that enable individuals to post and/or exchange information about themselves and information that are relationship oriented. Among these are blogs, twitter, youTube, faceBook, mySpace, (and probably more being developed even as we speak. One can participate in many of these and remain anonymous, or not having to meet person to person to elicit dialogues with others. One can develop a "virtual" personality that may be far removed from one's real persona. In this way, one may disguise oneself and maintain privacy, while at the same time establish some kind of a relationship in a network context.

Finally, the growth of the Internet has resulted in the effective commercialization and commodification of cyberspace (Dahl, 1998). For example, National Public Radio, in a broadcast in February, 2005, gave a report of a Chinese entrepreneur who owned a small manufacturing business in a remote town in China who advertised and sold his products on e-bay. He used a personal computer put together by a relative from the parts of old discarded computers. In another report, also by NPR, many small towns in India are hosts to small computer offices set up to take care of "outsourced" business from firms located in the United States. This is also occurring in the Philippines, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka. It

should be noted that these countries all speak English as a second language, or as the language of advanced education in these countries.

The teaching of English has become big business in these countries as a result of the need to speak the language of globalization in order to remain in business. Such classes are offered by established schools or universities as well as private institutes set up solely for the teaching of business English for profit. For those who can afford it, many come to the United States or to Great Britain to acquire a "state side accent" or British accented English. These two types of accents are more preferable than the locally accented English for domestic business and social purposes within these countries.

Another example of the commercialization of cyberspace is a service that is provided for other educational purposes. Indian college graduates offer tutorial services in mathematics to American high school students in the United States. The American students log into their computers at a designated hour in their own homes or their school to connect with their tutors who are in India. The tutors are recruited by a company who contracts with a similar company or a school in the United States to provide the service.

A less admirable application of the internet is the availability of already prepared term papers on a variety of subjects which are then downloaded by students, sometimes for a fee, and submit it to an instructor in fulfillment of a course requirement. Universities have countered this by using software that can identify such cases of plagiarism.

The World Wide Web which is an Internet related system provides a variety of information from all sorts of data bases from the learned to the banal. The e-trade makes it possible to make money transfers for commercial purposes at any time of day or week, and to keep track of business related information like money markets, stock trading or futures market. Entrepreneurs are able to "roam" around the world through their computers to seek new markets with greater speed, build new contacts and create innovative products to satisfy consumer demands. The competition for labor is intensified, as skilled workers can migrate to places where they can earn higher wages and opportunities to improve their living standard and quality of life.

The ability to communicate quickly can reduce the sense of isolation of remote areas, and provide the inhabitants a sense of participation in their economic, political and socio-cultural development. The potential for the democratization of society is increased when every member of society, regardless of class,

ethnicity, gender, religion or party affiliation can more easily obtain information that can help them make informed decisions about their lives and their system of governance.

Finally, the promise of the new communication technologies, with the Internet as the major tool for education, should bring about a decrease in illiteracy in all parts of the world. Literacy is necessary for development, and as literacy develops, it impels a nation to modernize and globalize. Also, because the new communication technologies require specialized skills to operate them, there is need for talented individuals to learn new skills. The result is the creation of new employment opportunities thereby helping to inhibit brain drain from the developing world to the industrialized societies. To give an example, Singapore has put a stop to its brain drain by becoming an information hub in its region. In India, something similar, though not quite identical, is occurring. As businesses in the United States “outsource” their routine computer – related business operations, Indians educated with computer skills can now hold jobs in their own communities rather than travel into over-populated urban centers in search of productive employment. In other countries of South and Southeast Asia, while many of their skilled workers continue to move in search of better opportunities, the surge has slowed down to a small current.

Yet, despite these new developments, the promise of the digital revolution and its partner, globalization, has not been fully realized by all countries. By every relevant measure, from the size and penetration of telecommunications or the extent of Internet diffusion, to the level of global economic commerce, the vast majority of activities employing the new information and communication technologies are concentrated in the industrialized world (World Economic Forum, July, 2000). For example, there are more Internet hosts in France than in the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean taken together, and there are more in New York than in all of Africa. Australia, Japan and New Zealand have more Internet hosts than the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. But, while the picture is bleak in terms of connectivity, for some members of the developing societies, there have been some increases. According to Oykvind (2001), in Africa, at the end of 1996 there were 11 countries that had Internet access. By March 2000, the number was 51 countries. Only Somalia and Liberia did not show any improvement..

The relative share of the Internet hosts has actually increased in the developing countries. In 1993, they had 0.1 percent of the Internet hosts, while in 1999 they had 1.7 percent. The Least Developing Countries however, such as Afghanistan, Armenia, Burundi, Congo, Haiti, Kazakhstan, North Korea,

Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Zambia, have fallen further behind (Oykvind, 2001)

Globalization and the Digital Divide – An Ethical Complication

Information technology and the ability to use and adapt to it, is the critical factor in generating and accessing wealth, power and knowledge in our time. Those without the necessary skills, access and resources for connecting with the digital community risk being further marginalized as the economy and societies become increasingly dependent on electronic information systems.

Various governments, non-governmental organizations, and concerned citizens have labeled this phenomenon the “digital divide”. The *digital divide* refers to unequal development and access to information technology, especially the Internet. It is important to note this problem because the digital divide is restricting many peoples and nations worldwide from interacting with each other openly and transparently, and to share ideas that can lead to better knowledge and understanding of each other. When citizens of a country are not able to access the World Wide Web in their home or community center, they are deprived of important information that may lead to a better standard of living, such as health, employment opportunities and educational advancement. Among nations, access to information, and the ability to communicate with other countries are critical in their process of development

Ordinary individuals, especially in developed societies may wonder of the existence of a digital divide in an age where many countries are prospering and modernizing. Some reasons that have been advanced include the following:

- (1) Many nations, in the developing world are so poor to afford the infrastructure that are necessary to be connected to the “wired” world.
- (2) The existence of computer illiteracy such as the inability to read, write and speak the language of the Internet, English.
- (3) The presence of cultural constraints such as religious beliefs, taboos and distrust of innovations.
- (4) The politics of government and policies that limit the inflow and/ or outflow of information add to the inequality or the denial of access to information.

From the perspective of economics, the relative costs especially in developing countries, for connection to the Internet is higher than in developed societies. In most of the African countries, the cost of Internet use is almost equivalent to the monthly salary of a civil servant. This is also true in many parts of Asia and Eastern Europe. Even in places where there are cyber cafés the user fees are so prohibitive for the majority of potential users (Alozia, 2001).

However, there are great variations in the charges for Internet accounts depending upon the maturity of markets, tariff policies of telecom operators, national policies and access to international bandwidth. It would cost less to access the Internet in South Africa, than in Ghana. Still, in most developing countries, these Internet charges are far beyond the means of the great majority of their people. (Oykvind, 2001). In the United States, for example, it usually costs approximately \$30 US for a monthly fee of about 50 hours of access. It costs practically nothing at educational institutions and public libraries. In Southeast Asia, except in Singapore, it costs an average of approximately \$50 US, plus telephone fees for monthly access. In Africa, it costs an average of \$50 US to use local dial-up Internet account for five hours a bandwidth.

In order to get connected to the Internet, one needs a telephone line. Most countries of the developing world are still not adequately supplied with telephone connections, especially in remote areas. It often takes months or a few years from an application to an installation. In the Philippines, for example, it may take months or years to acquire a telephone line, unless one has personal connections in the right places, or an appropriate bribe to shorten the application process.

Most localities in the poor countries in Asia and Africa do not have electricity to power computers, and a broad bandwidth that is necessary for the operation of digital communication is still not widely available. Again, these all relate to lack of financial resources by governments to initiate sustainable infrastructures.

Education is another problem. The lack of computer skills is related to the rate of literacy. While the rate of literacy has gradually risen in many poor countries, knowledge about computer operations is not yet readily available. In countries such as India and Pakistan, however, where government policies mandate and enforce laws in education for all children, leading to a higher degree of literacy among its citizens, computer knowledge is very high. Educational institutions, which specialize in computer education, have

proliferated. In these countries, there are a number of e-business and dot.com enterprises that are world class, and which can compete effectively on a global scale. These can serve as role models for other developing societies.

Education is a luxury to many people in poor countries. Every member of a household has a role to play in order to fulfill survival needs such as securing food, clothing and shelter. Even in countries where the law requires the education of children to a certain level, usually up to secondary or high school, enforcement procedures vary widely from strict adherence to benign neglect.

Finally, in some countries, notably in traditionally religious communities where women's place in society is circumscribed, they are not encouraged or allowed to pursue an education. Boys are allocated the scarce educational slots because of the custom that they grow up to be the "breadwinners" in the family. Thus, since it takes a specialized skill to learn how to use a computer, the women miss out on opportunities for advancement.

There is also a mistrust of innovations, especially in the least developed societies. Many of these societies are predominantly oral in their modes of communication, conducted largely through interpersonal face to face situations. The people have always relied on face to face communication where they can see the "total" person with whom they interact. When there is communication that does not entail the actual physical presence of a person as sender or receiver, it can not be trusted.

There is also the generational gap to consider. Older people are not quite motivated to learn computer skills because of the perception that it is very difficult to learn the basic skills of operating a computer. Resistance is also due to apathy and pride. Many of the elderly don't want to expose their inability to learn, especially as they see how adept young people are in mastering such skills. So they convince themselves into believing that the gains are not worth the effort. There is also a belief among many of them that they've been able to make do with what they've had, and so see no sense in making life more complicated at this stage of life. But, in the United States, there appear to be a changing attitude among many of the senior citizens. The new motivation stems from the fact that they can communicate better, more often and faster with their grand children or great grandchildren, and like the feeling of a closer interconnectedness with the younger generation of their kin. Thus, according to AARP,

approximately 41% of senior citizens of the United States are now able to use the personal computer much to their satisfaction (AARP Bulletin, January/February, 2005).

Status or social position and material wealth can determine access to innovations such as the new information technologies. In an interview conducted by the author with some Chinese students, Chinese friends and American colleagues who've recently been to China she learned that the Internet and the cellular phone have become status symbols, especially among the emerging middle class in China. Parents will go to any length to have their young sons or daughters to at least have their own cellular phone and an e-mail address. Cyber cafes are proliferating in many parts of China, and the price and the usage rates are much cheaper than it was a few years ago. Because of the decrease in price and ready availability of computers, there are many young people using the Internet but mostly for entertainment.

Globalization and Culture Transformation

The advent of the new communication technologies has brought more countries into complex interdependent relationships so that an event in one country can have its repercussions felt worldwide. A relatively recent example of such a happening was the collapse of the baht in Thailand in 1997. It had a domino effect in the economies of the other countries of the region, who were forced to devalue their own currencies. The news of this event traveled so fast and so wide, thus affecting commercial transactions and stock markets in other parts of the world. The Asian economic crisis, triggered by the collapse of the baht, also had political ramifications in the region. Both Indonesian President Wahid and Philippine President Estrada were weakened and finally overthrown not only because of charges of corruption, but because they could not stem their countries' economic decline. A more recent occurrence which brought unprecedented cooperation among nations from all over the world was the tsunami that swept eleven southeast and south Asian countries with such devastation resulting in the loss of thousands of lives and property. The news traveled so fast in the whole world, and as soon as the calamity was reported, nations quickly mobilized to help the survivors. This is also what is now happening in the most recent natural catastrophe in Southeast Asia – the typhoon that has reportedly killed more than one hundred thousand people in Myanmar (Burma). Appeals, through mass media had many nations responding to the pleas for help and have sent in supplies and other kinds of help for the survivors.

Globalization has meant the liberalization of markets, free trade, increasing competition, privatization, and worldwide sweeping economic reforms. It has become synonymous with capitalism or free market economy. By economic policy makers in the developing world, globalization is viewed as an instrument for expansion of trade, increased exports, importance of consumer products and new employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers. It has been regarded as an unparalleled opportunity to raise living standards. Thus, we have seen some leaders of developing countries voluntarily subordinating their own laws and their decision-making powers to the mandates of supra-national entities such as the WTO, the IMF or the World Bank in order to enhance their integration to the global economy and accelerate the realization of their development strategies. But, while many third world countries have benefited from globalizing their economies, there are others that for various reasons have failed to participate fully.

Globalization Issues

Despite the overall advantages of globalization, some underlying fears or anxieties have arisen about its potential results. There has been a growing clamor in some quarters for a slow down on the process of globalization so as to allow nations to design their own strategies for development. The World Bank has responded to this clamor in recent years by no longer insisting on its "conditionalities" when giving assistance to developing countries. Among these conditions was the re-structuring of the political and economic systems intended to enable these nations to become more competitive in the world market. These have included the elimination of trade barriers or protectionist policies, some modifications in the political system, and some changes in income distribution.

There have been calls from some NGOs, the Green parties in various countries, and other organizations to reign in what has been regarded as globalization's "unregulated" expansion. The concern about lack of regulations or unrestricted globalization has sparked debates on the need for standards based upon a critical assessment of the impact of globalization on development, especially in nations with fragile economies. For example, there now exists an international consensus on the need to ensure that structural transformations that are aspects of globalization integrate such changes with national ecological realities and environmental policy priorities (UNEP, January, 1997).

Critics of globalization regard it as “a threat to cultural diversity, a path to environmental degradation, a form of cultural imperialism, and the ‘rise of a global monoculture ... resulting in the dismantlement of local cultures and self-sufficient economies (Mander, 1996). One critic, reflecting on the two sides of the issue comments that globalization is “... the road to the promised land or the pathway to perdition; a boon to the few or a blessing to the many; a generator of wealth, or a stealer of jobs,” (Wolf, 2001). It is interesting to note that many supporters from the developing countries, especially among the poorest of the poor ones, regard globalization as a panacea for all ills and have been most willing to make changes in their economic policies to attract investments by multinational corporations. Yet, at the same time, many of those who are stridently critical of globalization are nationals of developed countries.

It is clear from such confrontations between supporters and opponents that globalization, “ is.. indeed a complex and controversial process involving worldwide changes in economy, politics and culture” (Demenchonok, 2000). Economically, the international flow of commodities and of factors such as capital and labor is being accelerated across the borders of nation states. Politically, the sovereignty of nation states is weakened, and the authority of supra-national authorities is being enhanced. Socio-culturally, we see a world becoming more integrated and more interdependent using a universal language, English, to communicate with each other. But while contact between nations, cultures and societies have become more common providing great opportunities for intercultural communication toward a better understanding between cultures and within segments of a given culture have shown little or no improvement. In some cases, the gaps of misunderstanding seem to have widened. We are witnessing more conflicts among nations, among ethnic groups and among sectarian followers of the same religion.

However, despite the reservations about globalization expressed by many, there is little doubt, that overall, globalization has benefited even the poorest of the poor countries. According to World Bank figures released in 2001 and as reported in a recent forum on Globalization and Poverty sponsored by the Cato Institute, the number of poor people in the world has declined by 200 million, using 1980 as a benchmark for these numbers, while the number of people who have risen from poverty has increased dramatically. A large part of these increases have come from the large industrializing countries such as China, and India, and smaller nations such as Uganda and Vietnam. These countries have opened up their borders for foreign trade and direct foreign investments. On a comparative level, the poor countries that

have “globalized” had an average growth of 4% while the average growth for the rich countries was 2%. In Africa, where the income of the poor has gone up, they are eating better (more protein in their diets), and the children are healthier than before they were economically integrated globally (Cato Institute Report, Washington, D.C., 2001).

Other Ethical Issues

The promise of globalization, propelled by the digital revolution has been to reduce poverty and raise the standard of living for all citizens of the world. In some cases, this promise has been realized. Developing countries, which have embraced globalization, have shown a decrease in child labor, and in infant and child mortality rates, as well as an increase in school attendance. Additionally, the quality of life for their people has improved. Those countries that have not been integrated into the world economy, continue to remain poor.

But there are also some perceived effects of these developments, which raise several ethical concerns. *Globalization exposes conflicts between and within cultures that otherwise might remain hidden.* Authoritarian governments are challenged by the human rights demands of western democracies. Therefore, they may take defensive measures furthering the oppression of their peoples, which otherwise they would have deemed unnecessary. Two examples are China and Singapore, which have used extraordinary methods to prevent their people from receiving certain kinds of messages from the West. The movement toward free trade, the ‘raison d’etre’ of globalization has led to the liberation of people in the direction of controlling their own economic affairs. This threatens officials with a vested interest in keeping most of their people dependent on them (Machan, 2000).

Globalization has also been criticized to be the cause of major environmental damage. . Natural resource conflicts in the form of rapid depletion of virgin forests, the depletion of ocean fishing grounds, the decline of biological diversity, ozone layer reduction, global warming and the pressures of population growth as people are free to move, live and work as they please are some of the ecological ethical issues that cannot be ignored.

Traditional societies in developing countries fear cultural corruption by the West through

mass media and the Internet. When the younger generation is exposed to foreign entertainment media and popular culture by other cultures, mostly from the United States, they are introduced to new and different lifestyles and sexual mores, which threaten local traditions, beliefs, values and practices. This is particularly troublesome to the governments and the influential clergy in much of the Muslim world. Thus, they go to all lengths to suppress such developments. The elections and the resulting demonstrations expressing disgust over the outcome, and the clamor for a democratic reform especially from the dictatorial policies of the clerical establishment has been happening in Iran.

Globalization, with its emphasis on free trade and the free flow of information brings with it associated values such as freedom of choice, freedom of speech, consumerism, capitalism, and individualism. Authoritarian governments in developing countries especially detest these values because they threaten the leaders' hold on power. While some third world leaders have embraced globalization, they have taken pains to limit its scope so as to include only its economic aspects.

Globalization has been seen to be beneficial in countries that have been integrated to the global economy. But the wealthy countries, because of their dominance in trade, and better access to the new information technologies will continue to increase their relative economic advantages. while the poorest countries are left behind. However, there is a middle group of countries, which, because of their openness to foreign trade and foreign direct investments has grown even more rapidly than the advanced individual countries (Dollar, 2001). China is an excellent example of this development. It has risen from a developing economy to one of the wealthiest and economically productive countries in the world today. Finally, migrations from lesser-developed areas to the industrialized ones in search of better job opportunities rob the former countries of intellectual resources that they need to develop themselves.

While much has been written about the digital divide, an equally disturbing phenomenon has also escalated. *Within cultures, globalization has created a digital divide that intensifies the separation of social classes.* Some observers have called this phenomenon, the reinforcement of a two-tier society - the information rich and the information poor. The wealthy with their access to new communication technologies are able to maintain their economic connection to globalization, while the poor, deprived of such access, are left landless, homeless, and with few opportunities for well paying jobs that can sustain a family.

Globalization has also led to an urban/rural divide. In rural areas, people continue to live in traditional environments where change is very slow. Thus, they lack opportunities to modernize. Residents in the urban areas are exposed to various mass media that help them to take advantage of the benefits of globalization. They can also make demands from their government, which is mostly run by elites who give primary attention to the urban middle class and neglect the urban poor.

Opponents of globalization argue that transnational corporations which dominate the global economy have taken “*supreme control over webs of planetary commercial activity on which the new world economy rests*” (Demenchonok, 2000). Because of their power to impose changes in the structures and policies of the economic and political arenas, their activities are left unchecked, leaving the environment and the population the possibility of exploitation.

While there is a rise of democratization and increasing participation of people in decision making, this has been accompanied by an emerging global culture rooted in consumerism with English as its chosen “universal” language. Concerned critics of globalization view such a development as leading towards cultural homogeneity resulting in the demise of original cultures and languages.

Policy Initiatives

As noted earlier, the new information technologies, especially the Internet, offer a promise of a digitally connected world where information is easily accessible to any individual, regardless of status, race, gender, age or creed. They also promote the creation of more open societies by enabling citizens to influence policy makers both at the national and international levels. Private organizations and entities that operate the Internet and other information technologies make an important contribution to this process.

Governments for their part have recognized both the benefits of the information revolution, and the persistence of the “digital divide. At one of the high-level summit of world leaders convened by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (Earth Times, 2000), discussions underscored the widening rift between the “world’s computer technology haves and the have -nots.” “Social and economic progress and eventual prosperity for all, depend more than ever in today’s world on access to the new technology.” The summit concluded with an urgent call to bridge the digital divide,” and declared that a concerted international effort was “an absolute necessity in today’s interconnected world” (Earth Times, 2000).

Similarly, a meeting of high level government and industry officials from the Asia-Pacific region was held in Tokyo in June, 2000, addressed the widening economic gap in the region, between those with access to computers and other communication technologies, and those without. At the conclusion of the meeting, there was a general agreement among the conferees that their governments should work in concert to try to resolve the problem. (Communique, 2000). It was agreed that there was a moral imperative to resolve the problem as soon as possible. Efforts are also underway by some governments, in partnership with NGOs to determine how to effectively apply information technologies to development in order to decrease the gap between the "information-haves" and "information have-nots".

Policy issues such as the removal of trade protectionism by developed countries as well as increases in foreign aid without conditionalities so as to make it easier for poor countries to integrate into the global economy, are being discussed by policy makers in the World Bank. Countries that have borrowed heavily from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, such as Argentina, have been allowed to postpone or cancel some of their debt servicing payments which now exceed their export incomes (Dollar, 2001).

Conclusion

The unprecedented changes brought by globalization and the information technology, which have transformed all aspects of human activity from the economic to the cultural, call for the identification of standards that need to be observed by all of those who have been participants in these processes. The most urgent issues that need to be addressed include poverty reduction, economic integration, unequal access to information technology, the right to communicate and the maintenance of cultural integrity. While these problems are felt most profoundly in much of the third world, they are also causing a great deal of concern in parts of the industrialized world. It is this consciousness of the profound effects of globalization and the information revolution, that has led to a growing number of concerted efforts by organizations such as the UN and its various agencies, regional groupings such as the EU, ASEAN, ECOWAS and the G-8 to come together to set common standards to deal with challenges posed by globalization in a fast changing world.

I believe that overall, globalization has been clearly beneficial to most countries and their peoples. As a World Bank economist has found, in the countries that have grown most rapidly because of their decision to integrate into the world economy, even the poorest citizens have shared in these benefits. The downsides to globalization can be corrected by judicious policies by both their governments and by the international financial agencies, as well as the vigilance of NGOs and individual citizens of a country. Education for all must be a priority in a globalizing world. Access to information must be made a basic human right.

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