

Gender and New Threats to Human Security in the Era of Globalisation

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Abstract

This paper assesses the impact of globalization – including the gender impact - from the human security perspective. It argues that the concept of human security provides a useful framework for assessing the impact of globalization on people, and especially the gender dimensions of this impact. This perspective goes beyond concepts of poverty, inequality and human rights and focuses on the ‘downside risks’ or changes in the level of human well being due to sudden change that threaten the ‘vital core’ of human lives. Globalization is a process that creates instabilities and can heighten many risks. The paper concludes that women are particularly vulnerable to these new threats, addressing these threats require international action, and, and proposes an initiative to set an agenda for addressing new global threats with a gender perspective.

The last decade has been a period of rapid and dramatic changes in the world, many of them associated with globalization. This defining trend in today’s world creates instabilities and increases many risks to which women are particularly vulnerable. New or heightened threats—those of financial instability, employment restructuring, global crime, human trafficking, the spread of disease, and conflicts within national borders—present a major set of challenges for global governance.

Its impact of globalization on human well being has been endlessly analysed, but surprisingly few studies have analysed globalization’s impact on people’s lives from the human-security perspective. The human-security concept can offer a useful lens, focussing on threats that make human lives vulnerable to sudden changes that undermine the vital core of people’s well being and survival. It adds value to debates about poverty, inequality, and human rights by looking at risks and vulnerabilities. It shifts debates about security by looking at the security of people rather than of national borders.

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Globalisation is the defining trend of the world that is driven by clearly identifiable political, economic and technological changes that have removed barriers to contact across national borders: economic liberalisation, political liberalisation, and new information and communications technology.

On the economic front, the 1994 Marrakech agreement represented a significant leap in integrating world markets. It brought unprecedented reductions in barriers to trade and introduced multilateral rather than bilateral agreements. It extended the reach of trade rules beyond traditional areas to such issues as intellectual property and services. It also led to institutional enforcement procedures with the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO). These new arrangements would prove to have a greater global impact on national economies than trade agreements had ever exerted before.

Over the past 30 years, world exports of goods and services almost tripled—the daily turnover in foreign exchange markets increased from around \$10 to \$20 billion in U.S. dollars in the 1970s to \$1.2 trillion in 2001. Annual cross-border mergers and acquisitions, accounting for \$151 billion in the early nineties, soared to \$601 billion in 2001.

An ever-growing number of developing countries adopted an open trade approach. During the 1990s, India reduced its tariffs from an average of 82 percent to 30 percent, Brazil from 25 percent to 12 percent, and China from 43 percent to 11 percent. Country after country eased restrictions on foreign investment. Opening up external trade has been part of greater liberalisation of economies overall, accompanied by a shrinking of public sector products and services.

The economic changes were accompanied by rapid political transformations. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 broke down barriers to the flow of ideas and movement of people for some 400 million people in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Another 1.3 billion people in China and Vietnam became exposed to the global contacts and communications. Similar processes of political liberalization also took place in Latin America and Africa starting in the 1980s.

In all, some 81 countries took significant steps towards democracy over the past two decades. With prohibitions on political parties removed and censorship lifted, civil society organizations flourished within and across national borders and independent media multiplied and spread. The activity of international non-governmental organizations greatly increased, particularly in Eastern Europe and Asia. Today, 125 countries, with 62 percent of the world population, have a free or partly free press. Between 1970 and 1996 the number of daily newspapers in developing countries more than doubled and the number of televisions increased 16-fold.

During the same period, the pace of technological progress began to accelerate to unprecedented levels. With the introduction of Netscape in 1994 and its free availability,

the Internet became a generalized means of communication for the public rather than a specialized tool of researchers and businesses. Because information storage, access, processing, and communications are a basic input to almost all human interactions, technological breakthroughs altered the frontiers of what was possible in many fields. Extensive financial market integration, for example, would be impossible without long-distance trading in real time. Technical improvements also drastically reduced the time and cost of processing and communicating information.

These three factors—economic liberalization, political liberalization, and new technology—interact, often in mutually reinforcing ways. Together, they drive globalization by removing borders and shrinking space and time. Events on the other side of the globe affect people's jobs, incomes, and health. Unprecedented speed characterizes the exchange of ideas, as well as goods and services. Trade, capital, and information, together with norms, cultures, and values circulate beyond their national borders. Just one sign of this trend - the time spent on international phone calls went from 33 billion minutes in 1990 to 70 billion minutes in 1996.

Shrinking time and space and disappearing borders create an environment of rapid change in multiple areas of national and individual life. External flows of capital suddenly rise and fall, creating ripples in financial markets; new diseases spread more rapidly to reach epidemic proportions; and the spread of new consumer goods leads to global shifts in market demand. An environment of rapid change is inherently unstable and insecure. The increasing global threats to human security are outgrowing national abilities to tackle them.

The consequence of such changes in the world are both positive and negative. But the speed of the transformation is such that globalization is outpacing the policy responses that could make it work for people. Effective public policy—to facilitate the spread of positive effects and tackle the negative ones—requires action by national governments and international cooperation. Nations must engage in global stewardship that promotes and protects human well being. For several reasons human security is particularly useful as a perspective for setting global policy priorities for such action.

A human-security perspective challenges the focus on state security at a time when threats to people's safety come from states themselves. The disarray of states in transition exacerbates the security of people both within and outside their borders. And the dangers are not limited to military conflict: one country's energy policy, for example, has an impact on global warming and the human security worldwide.

The holistic nature of the human-security perspective is particularly valuable to women, who are often more vulnerable than men. The gender impact of economic, social, and political change inherent in globalization cannot adequately be addressed by an analysis dominated by income dimensions. Because it covers the failure to meet basic economic and social needs as well as insecurities related to conflict, the broader framework of human security helps to map out action plans that better account for these

problems. Policy makers can examine the relationships between the socio-economic and the conflict side of insecurity and attend to threats that are not captured by either the poverty agenda or the conflict agenda, such as global crime.

As globalisation accelerates, new threats emerge and old dangers are intensified. Appropriate policy responses are urgently needed to address the most acute of these threats.

Global crime. Criminals have been quite entrepreneurial in exploiting opportunities created by the shrinking time and space and disappearing borders of an integrating world. The economic power of organized crime, estimated at \$2 trillion in U.S. dollars a year, rivals multinational corporations. A worldwide weapons trade feeds street violence and civil strife in many countries. Money laundering is easier with globalised banking and financial services and relaxed currency controls. The Japanese Yakuza finances pornography in the Netherlands. The Russian Mafia sells drugs in New York. Lower trade barriers facilitate the transfer of a hijacked car from Johannesburg to Moscow. New technologies open opportunities for jobs but also for crime. A computer hacker can steal millions from financial institutions, and terrorist networks can operate throughout the world.

World crime fighters have been slower to respond. Barriers from the pre-globalization era hamper cooperation among national security operatives. Dismantling bank secrecy and providing witness protection for foreign investigations, for example, would dramatically improve the effectiveness of the fight against global crime. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is an important first step that deserves support.

Human trafficking. Each year, between 700,000 and 2 million women and children are trafficked across international borders, falling victim to a growing and particularly exploitative category of global crime. By 2002, the multi-billion dollar people trade replaced drugs as the world's largest illegal business. Only 14 countries have special legislation with respect to human trafficking. Elsewhere, human rights mechanisms in receiving countries do not help trafficking victims who fall outside of national legal systems.

Official policies may in effect collude with the perpetrators of this crime. Time consuming legal procedures drive immigrants to illegal channels to cross borders. Since states rarely consider trafficked persons as victims, corrupt government officials are too often free to collaborate and provide protection for traffickers. Instead, the victims—generally women and children forced into labor and sexual exploitation—fear arrest if they contact local authorities or representatives of their country of origin. Some governments, hungry for foreign exchange returns, are complicit with traffickers by covertly if not openly promoting sex tourism.

In the countries of origin, prevention should start with enhanced opportunities in employment, access to education, representation in power structures, and, crucially, birth registration. Protection in the countries of transit and destination should involve legislation that clearly defines the victims of trafficking, better border control that is free of corruption, non-criminalization of the victim, access to health care, employment, and shelter, recognition of victim status, and institutionalisation of protection programs. Pioneering initiatives have been undertaken by Italy and Thailand, among other nations.

Financial market instability and contagion. Capital market deregulation brought about not only a huge expansion of capital flows, but also the volatility evident in the recurrent crises from Mexico to East Asia, and now in Latin America. The term contagion characterizes the spread of capital market collapse, capturing the sudden threats that can have extensive impact on the economy and people's lives. Existing policies for emergency rescue operations were made for an earlier era, and agreement on how to curb the current volatility has been slow to emerge.

In East Asia, financial crisis destabilized the lives of millions and reduced the prospects for growth in that region and in the world. In 1996, net financial inflows to Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand totalled \$93 billion in U.S. dollars. But weeks later, as turmoil hit financial markets in 1997, these flows reversed to a net outflow of \$12 billion, a swing representing 11 percent of the pre-crisis gross domestic product (GDP) of the five countries. Indonesia experienced the most extreme reversal of economic and social achievements as GDP growth fell from 4.7 percent in 1997 to a negative 13.2 percent in 1998. All over the region, bankruptcies spread, real wages fell sharply, and more than 13 million people lost their jobs. Economic difficulties triggered or exacerbated social tensions between ethnic groups as well as rich and poor, resulting in erosion of the social fabric and a rise in crime, violence, and conflict. Around the world, repercussions of the East Asian crisis resulted in an estimated \$2 trillion drop in global output between 1998 and 2000.

Within East Asia, the escalating price of essentials such as food and medicine were accompanied by suicides, domestic violence, and other social consequences. Poverty rose dramatically, nearly doubling in Indonesia. School dropout rates increased and school enrolment is still stagnant. The poor, especially in rural areas, bore most of the cost of crisis. The fiscal approach recommended by the IMF further deepened the recession. While the economies affected have made a recovery, the global economy remains vulnerable to similar crises with severe consequences for people's lives.

Women are often particularly vulnerable to these sudden economic downturns. They worsen their already inadequate access to healthcare, schooling, and job training. Women's burden of unpaid work increases as families try to save on paying for health care and other services. With less of a say in decision making, women have less protection for their rights and are left more exposed to threats associated with economic crisis.

Threats to job security. The fast-moving economy and restructuring of production, competition for global markets, and rapid technological change accompanying globalization all open new opportunities for jobs. But as labor markets are pressured to be more flexible, job insecurity for workers increases. To compete in today's markets, workers must be able to take on new activities, to train and retrain. These demands encourage employers to shed workers and recruit a new workforce. Threats to human security, then, come not from high levels of unemployment, but from the ever-present threat of restructuring and rapid change in demand.

Mergers and acquisitions have caused corporate restructuring, downsizing, and massive layoffs. Rich and poor countries alike have weakened worker dismissal laws. Sustained economic growth does not necessarily reduce unemployment, and temporary jobs, which generally lack social security coverage, take a large share of the global workforce. By 1996, the share of workers in these less secure jobs increased to 30 and 40 percent in Chile, Argentina, Colombia, and Peru. In Egypt an increasingly common practice is to require new recruits to sign a resignation letter before they get the job.

Even the richest countries lack many of the basics to equip workers for rapid technological change. Despite universal primary and secondary education in the 30 member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, one person in six is functionally illiterate, unable to fill out a job application and excluded from the rapidly changing world that demands new information processing skills. Those who cannot get formal employment end up in the informal sector. In Latin America, 85 out of every 100 jobs created during the 1990s were informal sector jobs. A 2003 report by the International Labour Organization warns that the informal economy in developing countries can no longer absorb unemployed workers. It estimates that at least one billion new jobs are needed over the next 10 years to absorb those new to the labor market and to reduce worker poverty and unemployment.

A shift in national labor market policies is urgently needed. Policies have been responsive to employers' needs for a more flexible labor force but slower to respond with alternative forms of social protection. The welfare approaches of earlier eras may not be appropriate today, and new strategies for education and training need to be devised.

Women generally have weaker education and re-employment skills than men. Women may have benefited from new employment opportunities in either the informal sector or in such *maquiladora* industries as textiles and clothing. But these jobs tend to be precarious and to come with low pay, unsafe working conditions, and little respect for basic human rights of workers. These problems have been documented in multiple studies around the world that call for stronger labor laws and enforcement and greater social accountability of corporations.

Spread of diseases. The sudden outbreak of SARS in 2002 brought home the fact that, throughout the world, people are vulnerable as greater global interactions make containing infectious disease more difficult. Of all the treats to human security exacerbated by globalization, the spread of HIV/AIDS is the most critical. Forty-two

million people now live with HIV/AIDS, over 95 percent of them in developing countries and 75 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 5 million people were infected just in 2002, half of them young people. HIV/AIDS is spreading fast in areas recently thought to be relatively free of the virus. In China a million people are now living with HIV, while nearly 4 million people are HIV positive in India, second only to South Africa. In the early 1990s, Eastern Europe and the CIS countries appeared to be spared the worst of the scourge, but new surveys show that infection rates are rising quickly, especially in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine.

The threat to human security poised by HIV/AIDS has broad developmental implications. It does not stop with the individuals who are ill and die but extends to their families and communities. Millions of children are left orphaned, and the loss of trained teachers severely stretches school systems in countries with high prevalence rates, such as Botswana or Malawi. It has been estimated that one adult death corresponds to a reduction in food security by 15 percent. In urban Côte d'Ivoire food consumption dropped 41 percent per capita, and school outlays were halved.

Globally, women account for about half of adult HIV/AIDS cases, but young women's share is far higher. In many African countries, HIV prevalence among 15 to 20 year olds is up to six times higher for women than men.

Conflicts within national borders. Uneven globalization divides communities, nations, and regions. Social tensions are ignited when there are extremes of inequality between the marginalized and the powerful. The disaster of violence in Indonesia occurred when economic crisis set off latent social tensions between ethnic groups and between the rich and poor. In the last two decades, more people have died or suffered from violent conflict between groups within countries than in wars between countries. The number of internally displaced persons has increased dramatically, accounting for six million people by the end of 2000.

Of the multiple gender dimensions of conflict, the most visible is the surge of sexual violence. Rape as a weapon of war, now recognized as a war crime, is one of the most gruesome aspects of ethnic conflict. Increased gender-based and sexual violence often accompanies the rising poverty and collapse of social safety nets caused by conflict. Trafficking in women and girls is also associated with such a collapse during and after violent conflict.

Each of these new threats to human security targets women and girls. They constitute the vast majority of people trafficked for prostitution. In many countries, women are disproportionately affected by unemployment, involuntary unemployment, and part time work. More women are HIV positive than men. Women and girls are increasingly put in harm's way in conflicts that are not fought between professional armies but pit communities against each other within national borders. Gender based violence has become a common weapon of war.

New insecurities related to the process of globalisation are by no means the only important threats to human security today. Many long-standing threats continue, such as global warming. But national and global policy response has been slow to address the new threats. They demand urgent attention and a rethinking of conventional approaches that can be shaped by a human-security focus

Many problems of human security require solutions that go beyond what states can do on their own. The financial architecture set up in the post war era is inadequate for today's globally integrated capital markets; it provides no social protection. International provisions for refugees do not extend to people displaced by migration and trafficking. Police are national but the crimes are now global. National and international apparatus and systems to enforce labor standards were designed a world dominated by states, not multinational corporations.

An important, though complex, relationship exists between three aspects of society—violent political conflicts, poverty, and civil and political rights. While current arrangements for international cooperation treat these areas as separate domains, they must be dealt with simultaneously in countries experiencing conflict situations. New types of institutional arrangements would help fill the gaps created by a system that deals separately with conflict resolution, humanitarian relief, and long-term socio-economic and political development.

As proposed in the 2003 Report of the Commission on Human Security, a multilateral approach that responds to the full range of concerns and that can address the new threats driven by globalization needs to be developed. Important progress has been made. For example, the Security Council has helped propel a global response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Increased humanitarian action and peacekeeping operations are helping to rebuild war-torn countries. But many proposals in the report have yet to reach the drawing board.

Yet the existing international systems are far from adequately designed to prevent and respond to the new types of threats of the global age. The Commission Report has a rich set of specific proposals and raises critical issues – from saying no to amnesty for perpetrators of rape as a weapon of war in peace agreements, including combating trafficking in girls and women in the mandate for peacekeeping operations, to developing a more coherent international normative framework on movement of people, saying no to using intellectual property rights to block access to HIV/AIDS retrovirals, among many others. An important follow up initiative from this work would be to develop a global agenda to address the new threats to human security with a gender perspective.

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