From Globalization to Global Sustainability: Perspectives on Transitions

Sandra Bhatasara
Lecturer & Member of the Faculty of Social Studies Research Working Committee
University of Zimbabwe, Sociology Department
Research Associate – Women and Law in Southern Africa
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Consultant – Centgold Discovery Mining Consultancy

Keywords: Globalization; Transition; Sustainability; Pathways; Scenarios

ABSTRACT: This paper critically looks at the development of sustainable globalization by offering a transition perspective. Globalization in its current form presents more challenges than opportunities to the global societies. Reversing the process is a myopic idea, yet it cannot be left to the dictates of its movers such as multinational corporations, global financial markets and trade regimes among others to make it sustainable. The argument forwarded here is that there is the need for a transition to sustainable globalization. A number of fundamental pathways maybe followed in the process of transition such as managing the global governance systems, global trade, global financial market, multinational corporations and information systems. However, this is not prescriptive but a set of scenarios and ideas that nation states and policy makers may consider. The transitions processes are also not smooth thus it is also important to critically look at the challenges that stand in the way and the negative repercussions to societies.

Introduction

This paper presents a transition perspective to sustainable globalization. In my view, globalization is not entirely bad. Globalization presents various opportunities in different domains. However, we cannot deny the fact that the current nature of globalization, in terms of the speed, extensiveness and impacts on the earth system is unsustainable. The argument that globalization should be steered towards sustainability is undeniable yet the daunting question is how can that be done? The complexity of globalization and sustainability defy simplistic explanations, thus one should take an interactive perspective on transition by looking at some key scenarios in global governance, global trade, multinational corporations, markets and information systems. However, one ought to acknowledge that transitions should be viewed in long term perspectives. Specific targets, indicators for transition and importance vary. There is no guarantee that transitions to sustainable globalization will be smooth thus, a number of challenges can be seen such as lack of institutional mechanisms, resources, political and ideological resistance among others. In this regard, the imperatives for understanding the necessity for transitions, the possible scenarios and challenges will be understood by subjecting relevant literature to critical scrutiny using the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. This paper should be considered as a “think piece”. Globalization, sustainability and transitions are too complex to be considered only from literature reviews. However, on the basis of the literature I
have reviewed, it has been possible to derive some scenarios and conclusions on the transition to sustainable globalization.

**Review and Definitions of Concepts**

Globalization has a plurality of definitions, some of them proffered by the internalization, liberalization, universalization, westernization, modernization and deterritorialization approaches. This paper is concerned with transition to sustainable globalization which stems from the fact that the current nature of globalization is unsustainable hence the definition proffered here. Globalization refers to the unsustainable, accelerated integration, at the global level, of economic growth, environmental problems, human development, cultural dynamics and political engagements.

Sustainability is a difficult concept to define for various reasons. It is normative and there is no global consensus on what should be sustained. Some people argue for sustaining production systems whilst others argue for sustaining consumption patterns. At the same time, there are others who call for sustaining environmental quality, economic and social capital (Kemp and Loorbach, 2003). Borrowing from the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), the issue of sustainability is related to development or growth that meets the present needs without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainability should be about equal opportunities to utilize resources intra-generationally and inter-generationally. Sustainability should also be based on the ethical principles of equity in distribution of income, wealth and control of resources. The National Research Council (1999), defines sustainability transition as meeting the needs of a stabilizing future world population while reducing hunger, poverty and maintaining the planet’s life support systems. The definitions by the World Commission on Environment and Development and the National Research Council capture the three pillars of sustainability, which are economy, society and ecology on which transitions to sustainability should focus. Grosskurth and Rotmans (2004), argue that one important denominator of these definitions is an implied balance of economic, ecological and social developments.

The concept of sustainable development has received criticism from various angles, one example being that it is considered as vague. Some scholars argue that the concept lacks definitional clarity thus it is prone to manipulation. However, the lack of clarity can be a strength in the sense it allows for a multiplicity of contextual interpretations which are absent in classical development discourses. At the same time, sustainability in most cases is interpreted in economic terms to mean sustainable economic development. Bensimon and Benatar (2006), for example argue that sustainable development should not be considered in economic terms, but should reflect other important aspects that are needed for a decent human life as well (e.g. education, a healthy living environment and democracy). As noted by Huynen (2008), they propose an alternate concept the “development of sustainability” instead of sustainable development.

Transition is also a highly contested concept, invoking various views from different scholars. According to Rotmans (2000), referring to the ICIS-MERIT (International Center for Integrated Assessment and Sustainable Development–Maastricht University Economic and Social Research Institute for Innovation and Technology) Report, transition is a gradual process of societal change in which society or an important sub-system of society structurally changes. Kemp and Loorbach, (2003) noted that transition is a result of an interplay of developments
that sustain and reinforce each other thus transitions are not caused by a single variable and are non-linear in nature.

Thus, borrowing from Martens and Rotmans (2002), in this paper, transitions refer to possible policies, strategies, paths or projects that can be undertaken towards the development of sustainability in a globalizing world.

A Case for Transitions to Sustainable Globalization

The phenomenon of globalization raises a number of questions or even quarrels and one of the most imperative questions is on sustainability. Here I present why we need transitions to sustainability in a globalizing world.

Supporters of globalization often associate it with unending prosperity and peace yet there are built in contradictions that make globalization unsustainable. Globalization supporters address the question of sustainability in a token fashion, if at all. The rapid growth of global markets and corporate capital is evident; however this growth raises the issue of sustainability. Huynen (2008) noted that “today it is acknowledged that achieving sustainable development on global scale is one of the greatest challenges for the 21st century” (p. 3).

In addition, a number of scholars converge on the idea that the current nature of globalization is threatening the earth’s capacity to sustain life. Nagarajan (2006) noted that some global indicators of change in the Earth’s landscape are distinct signs of human domination of the planet. These are increased atmospheric carbon dioxide, substantial modification of the planet’s land surface, increased use of finite fresh water supply, vastly modified nitrogen cycles, overexploitation or depleted fisheries and mass extinction of species (Nagarajan, 2006). Global warming, the thinning of the ozone layer, pollution, loss of biodiversity, depletion of natural resources, widespread desertification and deforestation are occurring within the context of globalization. These environmental problems restrict the set of options at the disposal of future generations to meet their needs thus sustainability becomes problematic. Furthermore, massive population movement and urbanization are also causing an ecological crisis. Ecological degradation reduces land productivity, threatens human health and worsens the conditions of the poor. In this regard, globalization is unsustainable.

Globalization may improve the material and social wellbeing of poor people but may be economically, socially, politically and ecologically unsustainable. The volatility of global markets is evident and history may repeat itself. The crash of the Argentine economy, the financial crisis in Asia in 1997 and the 2008 worldwide financial crisis are clear indicators of how financial contagion can produce economic depression. The volatility of global financial markets is systemic and there is nothing that is fully regulating it. Electronic trading makes it impossible to regulate global financial markets and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are unable to do so.

The myth of free trade is causing instability and socio-economic exclusion of the poor. According to Baum (2001), the current forms of globalization are making the world a safe place for unfettered market liberalism and the consequent growth of inequities. The developed countries use protectionist policies and subsidies on agricultural and cultural products whilst reducing protection over manufacturing industries. This is leading to the marginalization of the less developed countries in the form of low trade. In addition, there are myopic ideas of economic growth with prosperity. What is happening is not economic growth but, growth of specialization of production in countries such as India and China. The question is who will consume all the innovation and products? Another reason, globalization is economically
unsustainable is because of labour requirements and the devaluation of labour. The question is who will provide labour for the entire world?

Globalization is socio-culturally unsustainable because it is exclusionary and uneven. Two thirds of humanity is living in endemic poverty yet high growth rates are being witnessed. There is poverty among plenty or growth with poverty. The trickle down effect that proponents of globalization talk about has remained elusive. International and intra national income inequalities have widened. Globalization is distorting and swallowing local and national cultural values. Globalization is destroying subsistence economies of the poor, social security and moral geographies of poor nations. The principles of sustainability are therefore distorted. McMichael, Smith and Corvalan (2000) noted that it is because of unmanaged “transition” to development that is generalized to all countries in the form of unsustainable production patterns and wasteful consumption of rich nations that a new system is urgently required.

Financial assistance to the poor nations by the developed nations is reducing the poor nations to super exploited neo-colonies relegated to the roles of primary commodity producers entirely dependent and subordinate to the powers of multinational corporations. Globalization creates a risky and speculative or spoiled dependency. The nation state is said to have been incapacitated by liberalization.

On another note, immigration policies of the developed countries are exclusionary. They regulate the free movement of skilled labour yet they advocate free, unregulated trade. Globalization supposes integration yet there are no equal opportunities between the rich and the poor. This inequality negatively affects the economic performance of the poor countries. Global inequalities may also give rise to nationalistic reactions, resentment and terrorism thus upsetting peace and political stability. Ultimately, trade and the flow of people and goods are threatened. Consequently, the social, economic and political sustainability of globalization is jeopardized. To this end, there is a strong case for transitions.

**Methodology**

This paper is essentially a “think piece” and is based on qualitative literature review. To avoid omitting critical data, the review of literature did not follow a strict exclusion and inclusion criteria thus literature that contains relevant information on the theme focused on in this paper was included. A rigorous desk review was conducted to identify the relevant literature which includes journal articles, reports and books. In reviewing the literature, Critical Discourse Analysis method/approach was employed.

A number of scholars acknowledge that the concept discourse is slippery thus does not have a unitary definition. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) define discourse as a “particular way of talking about and understanding the world or aspect of the world” (p. 1-229). The scholars go on to say that discourse can be a group of ideas or patterned way of thinking which can be identified in text, verbal communication or social structures or a form of social action that plays a part in producing and reproducing the social world. On the other hand, Wood and Kroger (2000) state that “Discourse are possible statements about a given area and organizes and, gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, action and process is talked about.” (p. 137). In this regard, narratives or debates about globalization, transitions, and sustainability can be treated as discourse.

Wood and Kroger (2000) noted that “Discourse Analysis is a way of thinking about discourse, treating data, action or spoken language”. (p. 156) Critical Discourse Analysis has been informed by scholars such as Habermas, Lucas, Althusser, Gramsci, Ardono and Foucault
and their main argument is that critical theory should be directed towards critiquing, changing and improving the understanding of society. Taylor (2004) regards Critical Discourse Analysis “as a framework for systematic analysis of multiple and competing policy discourses” (p.1-20). Thus, in this paper, transitions and sustainability maybe regarded as policy options. Critical Discourse Analysis is reflexive, open to multiple readings and accepts the limits of objectivist impartiality (Flowerdew, 1999: 1093). Critical Discourse Analysis is an interpretive, descriptive and explanatory form of critical research that rejects the dominance of value-free science and disinterested facts. Flowerdew, 1999:1094), says that “Critical Discourse Analysis approach is dialogical and it is made plausible by literature review and self-disclosure. To this end, the literature review looked at debates, arguments and statements on transitions, globalization and sustainability are subjected to systematic inquiry using Critical Discourse Analysis.

However, Critical Discourse Analysis approach has some limitations. Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis can be defined from any perspective and this may lead to conceptual confusion and dangers of competing and uncontrolled methodologies. On the other hand, Stubbs (1997) acknowledged that Critical Discourse Analysis is a disguised form of political correctness. Furthermore, there is no specific method for conducting Critical Discourse Analysis thus replicability of methods of analysis may be difficult.

**Pathways to Sustainable Globalization: Key Scenarios**

The necessity for a transition to sustainable globalization has been shown above. However the actual transition processes may vary among global nations, from moderate to radical, incremental to contingency or precautionary approaches. Some people would argue that moderate approaches, reforms and management are what are necessary and feasible to correct imbalances created by globalization and, to steer globalization in the direction of long term sustainability. Though not very explicit, there can also be conditions that should be met for smooth transitions. In addition, we cannot deny the fact that transitions can have very negative repercussions on nations and societies therefore there should be careful considerations on which direction to take. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is imperative for me to state what this paper does not argue. The following views are not blueprints or prescriptions that should be followed. These are desirable scenarios in order to make the transition to sustainable globalization.

**Governance Systems**

Transitions require new forms of adaptive and dynamic systems of governance and strong institutions. We need to acknowledge the limits of traditional global bureaucracies. “The sustainability transition cannot be expected to occur on its own or as the inevitable outcome of current trends. It will only occur if we make it happen, and so in the near future. This is a task for the international community, as it feels its way towards more effective forms of global decision making” (McMichael, Smith and Corvalan, 2000).

McMichael et al. (2000) noted that the biggest motivation for transition will be to understand the risks to human health posed by overloading the biosphere. In line with this, one can argue that transitions within the ecological domain of globalization should focus first on the three cornerstones of global governance. These are intergovernmental organizations, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and finance mechanisms. Intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Trade
Organization (WTO) are responsible for coordinating different policies at the international level. According to the World Resources Institute (WRI, 2003), UNEP can be strengthened by substantial and reliable funding (including national contributions) and restructuring for effective coordination of policies. MEAs represent the legal framework for international governance, for example the Kyoto Protocol and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). One can argue that transition within the current system of international environmental treaties for sustainable globalization requires a mix of incremental policies and fundamental systems change. Goals should be institutionalized within the United Nations frameworks. Borrowing from the WRI (2003), harmonizing MEAs by cooperative research, shared capacity development, education programmes and cooperative monitoring of compliance are steps that can be taken. For example the Kyoto Protocol is not enough to reduce carbon emissions if there are no credible monitoring mechanisms.

The global financial regimes represented by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are responsible for financing different mandates including environment policies. In light of this, transition to sustainable globalization in this domain should be done by creating new rules for investment, lending, and borrowing. There is a need to synchronize the environment management regimes with the economic and financial policies and responsibilities of the World Bank and IMF. There is an urgent need for transparency and accountability by the financial regimes so as to promote a sustainable system of financial assistance to the developing countries. Though it is not clear how it can be done, the aid and debt regimes should be such that they do not harm developing countries, they provide risk reduction and provide ways towards international bankruptcy laws that specifically benefit poor nations (Stiglitz, 2006).

I would rather subscribe to Streck’s (2002) concept of “networked governance” than nothing. She presented that “networked governance” brings together governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations. There are also commendable recent trends in global governance that indicate that the focus has shifted from intergovernmental activities to multi-sectoral initiatives such as changes from governance at the international level to governance across different levels, and from a largely formal, legalistic process to a less formal, more participatory and integrated approach. However, the successes of this framework cannot be overstated.

Global public policy networks have been identified as a noble part of such governance framework to address sustainability problems posed by globalization hence they should be supported. Global public policy networks offer a promising model for how to handle new governance problems because complex sustainability problems cannot be governed by a single sector, such as the public sector or from a single level, such as the national level. Governance structures building on networks are able to bridge the gap between the public, the for-profit, and the non-profit sectors and to integrate human and financial resources to globalized multifaceted sustainability problems. Streck (2002:7) emphasized that:

The promise of these networks lies in two central domains. First, through their ability to formulate quick responses to urgent problems, networks offer the opportunity to close the operational gap that characterizes international environmental policy today. Second, through their multi-sectoral and non-hierarchical structure, networks promise to bridge the participation gap that often is the main reason behind international political deadlocks. Because of these two characteristics, global public policy networks generate benefits that go beyond the sum of their parts. (p. 7)
For example, though not everyone would agree and of course there are some flaws, the World Commission on Dams (WCD), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the flexible mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol are some of the cases of networks that have been instrumental in forging successful working arrangements (Streck, 2002). Inclusiveness, openness, and transparency are the key principles around which the WCD was formed. With funding from a variety of public, private, and civil society organizations, the WCD conducted a comprehensive global review of the performance and impact of large dams. The organization held public consultations on five continents and was funded through a new model involving contributions from governments, businesses, and NGOs. One of the lessons learned from the WCD is that establishing a basic measure of trust is critical for consensus building and standard setting in a conflict-ridden environment, although it is time consuming and costly. In highly contentious policy arenas, a participatory and inclusive approach, using open sourcing to pool knowledge, is imperative for producing effective and politically sustainable results (Streck, 2002).

The GEF has attempted to operationalize a unique and integrative governing structure which combines structural flexibility with a strong ability to adapt to a changing globalizing environment. Through the restructuring process, the GEF became more transparent, more democratic (with a double majority voting system), and more detached from the control of the World Bank (Streck, 2002). It built a significant role for NGOs, recognizing the value of institutionalizing alternative perspectives (Esty, 1998). NGOs within the GEF contribute to consultations prior to each Council meeting; observe at Council meetings; engage in working groups on demand by the GEF Secretariat; generate data, information, and independent analyses; provide inputs to other activities initiated by the Secretariat (monitoring and evaluation activities, programs, and operational strategies) and lobby for donor contributions.

In as much as I have problems with the Kyoto Protocol, I cannot deny the fact that some of its aspects provide evidence of the strength of networked governance. Through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation (JI), the flexible mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol, the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change established a platform that allows public-private networks to develop, finance, and supervise projects. The Kyoto mechanisms surely present great examples on deal making, matching interest and resources. In this regard, “networked governance” through global policy networks can be a great mover of the transition process.

*Trade*

Trade is one of the major driving forces of globalization. As mentioned above, new systems of global governance should be adopted and should, among others, be extended to governing trade. However we cannot expect the World Trade Organization (WTO) to be democratic in a day. We should seek other avenues thus, a dynamic transition towards more fair-trade and fair traders is necessary. Fair-trade has some of the following characteristics: paying a fair wage in local context, public accountability, long term trade relationships, transparency about production costs, and nutritional characteristics of products (Becchetti and Adriani, 2004). Fair-trade must be a strategy towards global sustainability and to alleviate poverty that goes a long way than economic benefits. Raynolds, Murray and Taylor (2004) noted that while financial benefits of fair-trade appear the most significant in the short run, in the long run, it is the empowerment and capacity building nature of fair-trade that will prove most important in fuelling sustainable development. Becchetti and Adriani (2004) provide the bottom up approach in the fair trade system whereby consumers in the developed countries can
demand ethical products and fair prices for goods from the developing countries. This also requires a transition from free traders to more fair traders.

Stiglitz (2006) has outlined some of the conditions necessary for the transition to a sustainable fair trade system such as developed countries opening their markets without conditionalities, broadening development alternatives of developing countries and moving away from reciprocal trade among all to reciprocal trade among equals. In this case, medium income countries will trade with developing countries in a more fair way because the development and power gaps are not as wide. However, transition is also required in the developing countries for the fair trade system to take effect such as good governance, knowledge, infrastructure and technology.

The relative success of fair trade movements and Alternative Trade Organizations (ATOs) as highlighted by Leclair (2002) and Raynolds (2000) indicates that transition to global sustainability is possible. Raynolds (2002), in her reference to global agriculture, noted that by demystifying global relations of exchange and challenging capitalist market competitiveness, fair trade movements can create progressive ways to bridge the North/South divide and end MNCs socially and environmentally destructive business. New systems of production and trade in the agro-food system can be created through lobbying for progressive alterations of international regulations, creating new networks and raising consumers’ consciousness.

Leclair (2002) showed that transition is possible as he outlines some of the achievements that have occurred so far to promote the global fair trade agenda. By focusing on the most disadvantaged groups in countries such as Kenya, India and Peruvia, ATOs have managed to foster product development, raise consumer awareness, empower local producers and give producers a relatively stronger position in the world market. On a different note, following the collapse of talks in Doha in 2006, the ideas of greening trade and creating an open, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system are still very challenging yet they are crucial in sustainable globalization. Successful transitions can be achieved by widening the terrain for negotiation, creating new regimes for partnerships, interactive and multidimensional synergies within the global trading system.

**Multinational Corporations**

Global sustainability transitions require some continuous redefinition of social responsibility of corporations and economic responsibility of the state. This redefinition can be done within the realm of global governance mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. Bhagwati (2004) said that the edifice of corporate social responsibility should be based on altruism and regulations. Stiglitz (2006) though not very explicit, suggested that the globalization of monopolies requires global corporate laws that are enforceable. Stiglitz (2006) further argued that there should be polices to limit the power of multinational corporations, improve corporate governance and systems to reduce the scope of corruption by both governments and corporations. For example, let us examine global taxation systems, particularly the harmful effects on developing nations when multinational corporations engage in tax avoidance scams.

Singh (2005) agrees that tax issues have remained very essential in the debates of international financial architecture. Gray (1998:82), noted that investment decisions are influenced by the ability of transnational corporations to extract tax and regulatory concessions from competing governments, leading to profound market distortions which undermine the assumptions of the global trade model. The world saw in Germany in the summer of 2004, crowds of people joining together to act against tax avoidance carried out by multinational telecom Vodafone and experts in taxation and activists of social movements from India, UK,
Belgium, Finland and Peru have also called for reforms against practices such as transfer pricing, thin capitalization, and bank secrecy.

Regarding tax avoidance and other associated tax problems, several policy scenarios are necessary though it is difficult to conclude which ones work. Some scholars such as Hampton and Christensen (2003) proposed that the only way to effectively counter harmful tax practices is through global initiatives. Singh (2005) goes for the Tobin tax and removing tax bureaucracy. On the other hand, Christensen, Coleman and Kapoor (2005) argue that tax justice should be the focus of global activism. From all these scenarios, I support that a multilateral framework is required to balance the need for sovereign states to protect their tax revenues from aggressive tax avoidance, respecting the right of democratic governments to determine a tax rate appropriate to their circumstances. At the same time, measures are required that will empower governments to stem their tax losses and to resist pressure from transnational corporations to degrade their tax regimes. For example, in 2003, the United Nations General Assembly signaled a move in this direction when it decided to move towards the creation of an inter-governmental commission to re-orient the international tax policy framework.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), although regarded as a dubious agenda is one way in which multinational corporations can move the transition process. I do not agree with the conclusion by Frynas (2005) that “…, my argument is that there are fundamental problems about the capacity of private firms to deliver development, and the aspiration of achieving broader development goals through CSR may be flawed”. Multinational corporations (MNCs) can have a positive impact in developing countries, especially through CSR initiatives focusing on sustainable development and co-operation with civil society (Ite, 2004). I would agree with his conclusion that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has a powerful potential to make positive contributions to addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities if underlined by good governance practices. There is need to strengthen global corporate social responsibility movements like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Corporate Watch and Social Accountability International in their endeavors to influence corporate behavior in socio-economic and environmental issues through rational persuasion, litigations, consumer boycotts, shareholder activism, social auditing and selective purchasing laws. There are some success stories such as those against Chevron and Shell in Nigeria, Unocal in Burma and Texaco in Ecuador. Global corporate social responsibility movements may one day lead to the adoption of globally enforceable legal standards that bind MNCs to their social and environmental responsibilities for us to have a transition to sustainable globalization.

**Markets**

In this area, new architecture and modest adjustments are required for transition to sustainable globalization. Bhagwati (2004) talked about the new architecture of non-governmental entities such as Merck in Botswana, which can be platforms for economic transition and offer international alternatives to global marketization. Though it seems utopian, some scholars have suggested global and regional social contracts and surveillance of banking and finance systems by a central world institution. One can argue that after the 2008 economic and financial crisis there is need for a transition towards new global market and financial order around the nexus of partially regulated economic growth, financial discipline, social development and environmental quality based on trustworthy partnerships between the public and private spheres. Becchetti and Adriani (2002) noted that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports the idea of creating global public goods, however the feasibility of the idea is questionable.
The deregulation of markets is not enough to ensure sustainability thus, rules of international markets should be radically reformed by establishing a minimal but effective regulation of these markets. The regulations of international markets should be done in a non-bureaucratic and accountable way and it should ensure the participation of all countries in the decision making process and its application. The process of deregulation should be in line with environmental and social constraints that underlie the sustainability of globalization. Regional markets and blocks, though their flaws cannot be underestimated can also be alternatives to global neoliberalism and these should be taken seriously. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), formed in 1967 has recorded some notable successes.

Global Activism

Globalization can be managed and moderated if activism and public opinion pressure governments and markets decisions for democracy, equal market competition and environmental sustainability or quality to improve economic, ecological and social conditions. In Seattle in 1999 activists denounced starvation wages, labor standards in Asia and inadequate work and health conditions. There were anti-IMF/WB demonstrations in Washington in April 2000 and Prague in September 2000 and Mexican farmers demonstrated in solidarity for credit at favorable interests for agricultural development and better conditions of access of their products to North American markets.

Berchiesi (2001) looked at South African organized labour, with particular regard to the South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU). SAMWU has been challenged by the pervasive penetration of global capital and multinational corporations in schemes of “Public–Private partnership” in the delivery of municipal infrastructures and it identified international action against global capitalism as a decisive terrain of struggle for workers’ and citizens’ rights. Berchiesi noted that the struggles of South African municipal workers underline the relevance of issues of privatization, both in linking union activism to the broader demands of grassroots communities and in providing new potential connections between the discourses of local specificity and globalised resistance. However, Berchiesi (2001) acknowledged the union’s difficulties in articulating an effective confrontation reflects broader problems in internationalist approaches adopted by South African labour.

The response of Brazil’s Central Única dos Trabalhadores to the challenges of liberalization posed by the rise of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) shows the need for transnational alliances:

With the globalisation of economy, we will not be able to face problems like unemployment through defensive and corporatist actions, confined to a national ambit. On the contrary, it will be by acting in an integrated form with workers of other countries that we will confront the consequences of trade and production liberalisation…. One of the weaknesses of our action has been the nonexistence of joint co-ordination and action with other organisations of the social and popular movement. MERCOSUR affects the sovereignty and the interests of the whole society and a charter of social rights must be a joint demand. (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores, 1996, p. 12)

Global activism needs to be coordinated and solidarity negotiated. These organizations can be invaluable allies to worker organizations as unions forge new networks of opposition to capitalism (Waterman, 2000).
These episodes and examples show how irresponsible and unsustainable globalization can be challenged in order to make it sustainable. In line with activism is the promotion of policies on education to redress inequality, particularly in the current phase of globalization characterized by increased mobility of information. This should be linked to new institutions that ensure participation of all nations. These new institutions can also become strong platforms for global education, macro-economic policies, infrastructure and rule of law.

Transition Challenges

Transition to sustainable globalization can be deterred by a number of challenges. Because of their economic and political hegemony, developed nations reject alternatives by the developing countries such as the removal of subsidies to farmers in developed countries. Realities in developing countries such as poverty, meager human, technological and financial resources, political instability and HIV and AIDS are setbacks towards sustainable globalization.

On the other hand, transition to democratic and fair systems of trade may not include progressive forces, for example the creation of parallel markets and right wing corporate opposition. Cheru (2000) noted that there are no basic institutional pillars for transitions such as education, democratic participatory structures and infrastructure especially in developing nations. For example in some Asian and African countries, administrative incapacity can make them fail to implement strategies and laws that are noble to deter harmful corporate deeds by multinational corporations.

The other major challenges that we would face are issues of prioritization and disagreements on what really needs to be sustained to achieve global sustainability. The cases in point are the debates on climate change and biodiversity. As if geography, climate, population size and resource differences are not enough, there are irreconcilable ideological differences for example between the Western and the Islamic worlds.

Conclusion

The transitions to sustainable globalization should be projects worth pursuing. The unsustainable character of the current globalization process poses threats to the earth system and all life within it. In this regard, there is a need for coming up with effective transition policies and strategies. However, there is also need to recognize that transitions cannot occur over night. It has been shown in this paper that a number of impediments or setbacks stand in the way. It is very challenging to find solutions to these barriers but it is worth trying. Among others, transnational non-governmental organizations and other global movements can lobby governments through the United Nations for specific changes, strengthening informal society groups, and informal economies, building inclusive alliances, monitoring Corporate Social Responsibility of multinational corporations and promoting collective self-reliance in developing countries. There is need to create social protection networks to cushion those who are negatively affected by the transition processes. It is also necessary to monitor trends, for example regionally, and assess progress otherwise we will end up with unsustainable transitions. There is no doubt this will take new dynamics in global partnership commitment and resources.
References


World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*. 1987