

Chapter 9

Women and Globalization

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ABSTRACT

Economic globalization is a process tending towards neoliberal economic policy reforms (such as deregulation and privatization) and increases in capital, goods, services, and workforce movement. Economic theory on globalization's impacts on growth and wellbeing does seldom make distinctions between genders. It is frequently assumed that women will pay the cost of market liberalization by an unquestionable loss of jobs, or of high-income jobs. However, trade theory suggests that a growing international trade should benefit women, especially in developing countries. In order to determine the impacts of the globalization process on women's quality of life, equality, and status it is first necessary to define what is understood under such terms and which variables are involved in their measurement. There seems to be some consensus in identifying the set of variables that define women's quality of life: economic, political, and social.

There are two schools of thought in analyzing the effects of globalization on women. One school, basically optimistic but with some reserves, argues that participation in global trade and in financial markets will improve the situation of all citizens, including women. The other has got a more critical perspective and argues that economic globalization will further increase existing inequalities and will lead to new ones. Both sides of the discussion on the effects of globalization on women are valid, but there is a the need to go beyond the sterile debate on whether globalization is good or bad, and reach a more constructive and wider-scope debate on how to achieve the best possible outcomes of globalization for women.

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Globalization must be analyzed from a multidimensional perspective and it is only by means of this process and by analyzing the real experiences of actors in adapting to globalization that we can understand the true outreach of globalization. According to this alternative perspective and in trying to develop a constructive debate on the impact of globalization on women a set of practices have to be detected, analyzed, and promoted in order to minimize the negative impacts of globalization on women and reinforce the positive ones. They include, among others: cultural change; sustained and mutually-agreed action programs among business schools, companies, and other interest groups such as the public sector; and removing the glass ceiling in MNCs, including codes of conduct as a part of their corporate social responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Economic globalization is a process tending towards neoliberal economic policy reforms (such as deregulation and privatization) and increases in capital, goods, services and workforce movement (Richards and Gelleny, 2007).

Economic theory on globalization's impacts on growth and wellbeing does seldom make distinctions between genders. It is frequently assumed that women will pay the cost of market liberalization by an unquestionable loss of jobs, or of high-income jobs. However, trade theory suggests that a growing international trade should benefit women, especially in developing countries (Bussmann, 2008).

Globalization will turn some into winners and others into losers. Examining whether economic globalization helps to improve some aspects of women's wellbeing, or if it rather hurts them, is important for various reasons (Gray, Kittilson and Sandholtz, 2006; Richards y Gelleny, 2007):

1. Excluding gender in theoretical and empirical research leads to a distortion of, or even a blindness to ubiquitous political and social developments.
2. Gender is one of the few division lines with social, cultural, political and economic implications worldwide. A focus on women allows us to address the impacts of globalization on a group which is at a disadvantage in all countries in the world.

3. Economic globalization is being pushed by governments; we often refer to it as a "top-down globalization". Those most negatively affected have no voice in its implementation process, and with no exception it is considered as a negative process leaving them without any option. Therefore, it is necessary to make the nature of such process more transparent.

This chapter intends to analyze the impact of globalization on women. It is divided into six sections. The first one analyzes what in most cases is understood as the dependent variable in the globalization process: quality of life, equality and status of women. The focus is on clarifying these terms, identifying the variables defining them and showing which indexes are most frequently used to assess them.

In the second and third sections the independent variable is analyzed, the globalization process and the two main areas it affects: economic aspects and socioeconomic ones.

The fourth section provides a comprehensive review of the literature addressing the impact of globalization on women's quality of life. It includes a wide-scope perspective of the two main schools of thought: the more optimistic view, which considers that globalization may contribute to improve women's quality of life; and a more critical school that considers that globalization will increase existing inequalities, and even create new ones.

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