

**CONTENDING WITH TRANSNATIONAL PROBLEMS IN THE
GLOBALIZATION ERA: QUESTIONING AND ARGUING FOR
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Percyslage Chigora
Midlands State University

Abstract

The increased interconnectedness between international actors has led to the rise in global problems that covers almost all spheres of life i.e. political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental. The effects of these problems have been catastrophic in many instances and their potential for growth and devastation are largely looming. Of concern worldwide has been the response to these problems. The response has rather been disappointing – slowness in reaction, lack of institutional capacity to respond and the overall failure to conceptualize the problems. I have come to the conclusion that there has been a worldwide reluctance to engage the curriculum that equips both theorists and practitioners with theoretical and practical ideas in confronting these global problems. In the research I will argue that there is need for institutions for higher learning across the world to consider the launch, revitalize and fine-tune international development programs (IDPs). I will examine how the programs can possibly be structured so as to address fundamental problems affecting the world, today and possible ones for the future.

Introduction

The increased contacts between communities across the world that have grown over the past three centuries have resulted in two net effects. On one hand, it has contributed towards resolution of certain problems that brought those close ties, and on the other some problems have emerged whilst others have deepened leading to a complexity of global problems. To date, it is not beyond doubt that the resolution to these problems far much exceeds their conception and their subsequent resolution. One thing that I have found to be lagging behind has been the designing and formulation of

institutions that will act timeously, tediously and continuously to provide a forecast, understand, analyse and provide adequate and appropriate policy and action to the resolution of the transnational problems. The institutions I advocate for are international development programs, not only at higher institutions of learning but also to lower educational institutions. The author is not losing hindsight of the programs that are already in existence but as the paper reveals, most of them are not properly structured, at most are not far divorced from state centralism and private interests driven as well activists-driven that makes the studies far much divorced from genuine effort of an academic endeavor that generates critical and academically sound global citizens for the safety of all humanity. The paper begins by historicizing the concepts of global/transnational problems and international development, then move on to provide the state of international development programs globally. The last part addresses policy issues making some insights into the future of international development programs and their relation to tackling transnational problems.

Background to Transnational Problems and International Development

The historicity of transnational problems can be traced to as far back as the existence of the interaction of human communities and their environment. The contemporary usage of the word recognizes the existence of national boundaries which can be traced to the Westphalia Treaty of 1648 that created the modern state system. It is important to highlight that a number of problems exist and are complex. According to Nautilus.org,

... Global problems can be distilled into broad categories such as those that arise from shared management of global commons (such as Earth's climate), the imperative to cooperate at a globally inclusive level to create a common good (such as trade rules), and the need to regulate human activity at a global level (such as laws prohibiting slavery or genocide).
(www.nautilus.org/gps/whatgps.html)

The basis through which they become global largely emanates from the fact that they affect almost, if not everyone who is the inhabitant of the earth and its surrounding environment. The origins of these problems have been subject of debate amongst academics and activists. In essence as Nautilus.org noted,

Global problems may exhibit linkage between cause and effect across societal levels from global to local. Global problems also reveal a disjuncture between cause and effect when the driving forces are highly centralized and concentrated both institutionally and spatially (and therefore are exogenous to most of humanity who nonetheless experience the effects of this change). Other global problems are the result of highly distributed and decentralized driving forces so diffuse yet cumulatively powerful that the resulting overall impact is qualitative even though it passes unnoticed except at the local level... Global problems may be the result of multi-directional causes that erupt suddenly from below or fall without warning from above, or both at the same time.
(www.nautilus.org/gps/whatgps.html)

In addition,

The breakdown in the rule of law internationally, the widespread and significant erosions of civil liberties, the prevalence of dangerous myths and superstitions, combined with the proliferation of destructive means, portend of a most alarming global scenario. (www.nautilus.org/gps/whatgps.html)

What is reminiscent of these problems is that they may not be easily or abruptly noticeable as it may take decades for them to emerge into vicinity. Problems, small as they may be in the first instance, if left unattended to can degenerate into catastrophic ones. This is a clear case with global warming where rapid industrialization only noticeable as contributing to air pollution has adversely knowingly or unknowingly contributed to ozone depletion.

International development as a concept and field study has its origins from international (politics/relations) and development. According to wikipedia.com international relations have existed in their current forms since the Westphalia Treaty of 1648 and development theory only emerged in the 10th century as a separate body of ideas. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development) The discourse on international relations was changed to encompass development and emerged under Harry S. Truman's vision for global development. In his January 1949 inaugural address, he noted of the shift noting,

"We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism - exploitation

for foreign profit - has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing."

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development)

Turning to the emergence of development as a field of study it can be traced to the second half of the twentieth century and was largely influenced by the increased concern about economic prospects for countries emerging from colonization and seeking ways of getting out of their poverty trap. In essence, the ideas were centered on economics and its subfield of development economics. However, soon did development academics and practitioners discover that pre-occupation with economics was leading them nowhere and moved on to try and integrate issues of politics within the development discourse. At most, it led to the emergence of the subject of international political economy. This also led to the incorporation of other social science subjects that impinge and have direct influence on development as a discipline. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_studies)

What seems to have transpired over decades of this somewhat experimentation with development implementation has been the ultimate failure of transformation of societies particularly those in the developing world. Shifts have ever been occurring in terms of focus with various theoretical underpinnings be they national or international but the results have been the same. In today's world there is now increased concentration on exploration of issues on,

poverty, with the metanarrative of modernization being replaced by shorter term vision embodied by the Millennium Development Goals...exploring opportunities for public-private partnerships and promoting the idea of Corporate social responsibility with the apparent aim of integrating international development with the process of economic globalization. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development)

In the modern discourse on development, there emerges a new thinking in approaching development issues that has led to the emergence of the concept of international development. According to Wikipedia.org,

International development is a concept that lacks a universally accepted definition, but it is most used in a holistic and multi-disciplinary context of human development - the development of livelihoods and greater quality of life for humans. It therefore encompasses governance, healthcare, education, gender equality, disaster preparedness, infrastructure, economics, human rights, environment and issues associated with these. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development)

Further, it clarifies that international development is,

a process undertaken by countries and communities with assistance from other nations' governments and communities, from international Non-Governmental Organisations (such as charities) or from intergovernmental organizations (such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank).... seeks to implement

long-term solutions to problems by helping developing countries create the necessary capacity needed to provide such sustainable solutions to their problems. A truly sustainable development project is one which will be able to carry on indefinitely with no further international involvement or support, whether it be financial or otherwise. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development)

Thus, it of importance to note that international development ought to be totally distinguished from other forms of development that takes place without international actors' involvement. Again it is easier to separate it from issues of disaster relief and humanitarian aid as *'these two forms of international support seek to alleviate some of the problems associated with a lack of development; they are most often short term fixes.* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development)

An Analysis of the Response to Contemporary Transnational Problems and the Status of International Development Programs

What appears conspicuous with the response to the emergence of transnational problems is that there has been, at most, failure to make inroads to sustainable minimization or complete end to the problems. However, this is not to dispel a number of actors and efforts that have been put in or attempting to put in place so as to address challenges to mitigating transnational problems. Analyzing what has been causing the failure has remained mirrored in controversy as the blame often shifts from one side of the circle to the other.

There has been an attempt from an academic point of view to approach issues of international development from an interdisciplinary point of view so as to provide a holistic understanding of the nature of these transnational problems thereby increasing chances of their solutions. However whilst this is a welcome development, this has generated more centers of concern and has resulted in shifting of blames (economists vs. political scientists, psychologists vs. sociologists, idealists vs. realists, natural scientist vs. social scientist etc.) The net result has been a haphazard conceptualization of the problems thereby impinging on their solutions. What I have found damaging from an academic point of view has been the designing of programs at institutions of higher learning that address international development from a point of view that is particularistic. The effect is educating the people who are subject area enlightened would play a minimalist role when it comes to international development issues. The first decades of development discourse bears witness to this as there was over emphasis on economics of development rather than understanding the entire society in order to formulate realistic development policies.

Another problem from an academic point of view that I mourn has been the continued emergence of courses that are socially relevant which tends again to be particularistic. For example they may address issues of women, HIV/AIDS, etc. Being narrowly constituted the courses will have three negative impacts on the trainee,

They keep the student's mind so narrowly focused on his random and transient political convictions that, when he ceases to be obsessed with them, he will lack the education with which to discover what to put in their place.'...Many courses are having a high prescriptive content and are

designed for the relevance of current issues. At their worst, these courses degenerate into superficial discussions of current affairs. In research field, projects have become problem oriented. (John C. Garnett, 1984:136)

The approaches to transnational problems have tended to be state centric. Interests of state are considered at most when a nation-state approaches transnational problems. At most, a political relation of sovereign states in ungoverned and anarchical, and when states act in face of the evolution of a global problem they look at how acting will enhance their interests. This is the reason why the USA had to go for decades out of the Kyoto treaty at the expense of global damage through depletion of the ozone layer hence contributing to global warming. Thus cooperating to end poverty particularly in the developing world is dependent not so much on the need to promote international development but on how the nation state's actions are likely to enhance its interests.

This leads to another hurdle of designing international development programs for eradication and containment of international problems. State universities and institutes that are funded by the state design their curriculum not so much to promote academic inquiry for the good of humanity or global citizenship but to enhance the state's interests. Therefore what is taught is largely depended on where the resources are coming from to fund those international development programs and what interests they want to promote.

The influence does not only come to international development academic units but also to institutions implementing development programs of which the implementers are from the institutions whose curriculum they largely influenced from its inception to its implementation. This is the case with United States Agency for International

Development (or USAID), which is the United States federal government organization responsible for non-military foreign aid. As an independent federal agency,

it receives overall foreign policy guidance from the United States Secretary of State and seeks to extend a helping hand to those people overseas struggling to make a better life, recover from a disaster or striving to live in a free and democratic country...USAID advances U.S. foreign policy objectives by supporting economic growth, agriculture and trade; health; democracy, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance. It provides assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa; Asia and the Near East, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and Eurasia. USAID is also organized around four main pillars: Global Development Alliance; Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade; Global Health; Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USAID>)

Again from state centric point of view, in as much as the academic inquiry is independent of values of the interests of the state, there are problems associated in having the required knowledge and how states make their decision so as to grapple with their negative dealings to solving international problems. As Garnet 1984:104 notes,

“A major problem faced by scholars investigating questions of fact is caused by the absence of reliable source material. Government business is often shrouded in mystery. Statesman and civil servants are inhibited from indulging what they know by Official Secrets Act, and even when they are

not so constrained their memories may be at fault, or, worse their diaries and personal records may have been written with half an eye on later publication. Even the public records themselves may not be unsatisfactory. Apart from the official documents are usually classified until they are no longer controversial, they sometimes disappear without trace, and, when published, distort the truth or by their selectivity.”

International civil society (ICS) again ought to be viewed and evaluated in the same way as most of them are interests driven and in as far much independent as they purport to be, they have funders behind them who normally share the vision of the institutions and the programs they design to promote international development. Here lie some fundamental questions: Where are these ICS from? Whose interests are these international civil society groups representing? Who owns global resources? Who controls global resources? Institutions that provide much funding are the transnational corporations or multinational companies.

It is surprising to some to realize that there are so many transnational corporations whose incomes supersede a large number of states and that their monetary policies can cause stirs in financial and economic policies of majority of states the world over. A question now will emerge on how policies and funding for international programs can be designed to contribute towards elimination of transnational problems, which at a most are caused by these very powerful corporations. Surprisingly, together with the powerful states they provide the funds for educational programs for international development, and

workshops and conferences that design policies for confronting development problems of which some are caused and exacerbated by some of these institutions.

It is of utmost importance to note that an attempt to frustrate their moneymaking ventures is likely to be met with full resistance and with full consequence for the concerned institutions, authorities, policy makers or politicians who would have caused the stir. I am convinced that the international system or the world system at most has to be viewed with utmost vigilance as, ‘ *It is true that a good deal of international politics takes place between enemies in atmosphere of fear and mistrust, but sometimes even friendly states enjoying a corroborative relationship find themselves in disagreement.*’ (John C. Garnett, Opicit:129).

Some of the problems that have emerged or been exacerbated as a result of the failure to address two fundamental questions concern the international development programs that are designed to solve global problems. First, what is the object or purpose of teaching international development? The question seeks then to expose the overall aim of teaching international development of which the purpose has to be in tandem with the objectives of having institutions of higher learning. If misunderstood and misread, this often leads to discord in the way transnational problems are conceptualized and dealt with. Second, what should be the nature of an undergraduate and postgraduate education in the program? This becomes a broader and more complex question to unearth the character and shape which the curriculum is going to take. Here a number of factors and actors have to be taken into consideration if the overall assessment and academic contribution has to be enhanced.

The answer to the above two questions has always stirred debate in the academic circles not only in the past but also in the current higher education debate as well as into the future. Some have argued that institutions of higher learning should teach to produce good citizens. As Garnett 1984:131 observes, 'Now it is understandable, if not inevitable, that governments and (institutions) should seek to inculcate among the young ideas and values which make their task easier'. This is exemplified by the following extracts,

It is our aim to create one day courses into which development professionals distil the crucial issues people should be aware of to be a global citizen and, especially, before participating in development interventions themselves. (<http://www.oxfordhub.org/idc>)

The International Development Courses (IDCs) are currently run in Oxford, Cardiff and Cambridge. They are courses organized for students by students with the aim of promoting and furthering development awareness in universities. Each university has their own independent committee organizing the events and deciding strategy. But in addition, inter-university collaboration ensures that we create a brand and share resources that make the individual committee's work much easier. (<http://www.oxfordhub.org/idc>).

Another example is SAIS International Development (IDEV) Program in Washington which,

Provides an interdisciplinary approach to the study of developing countries, with the aim of preparing students for careers in development... Washington, DC is in many ways the center of the development world. It is home to multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank; US government agencies or affiliates like the Agency for International Development, the Treasury Department, the National Endowment for Democracy; research centers like the Center for Global Development and the Brookings Institution; non-governmental organizations like Freedom House, the Eurasia Foundation, FINCA, Accion, and InterAction; and many for-profit service providers like Chemonics International or Development Alternatives International. Students in the IDEV program receive rigorous academic training that helps them better conceptualize the development process in its economic, political, and social dimensions. Many students combine this program with practical policy and field experience through an internship between their first and second years. Students also can expand their contacts with development practitioners through the networking that is possible in the Washington area. (<http://www.sais-jhu.edu/programs>).

What is noticeable is that there has been an overall attempt to fine tune programs to socially engineer students to conscious and take a leading role in development issues derived from a well-built frame of reference. However, as Garnet 1984:131 highlights it ought to be observed that,

‘Social training in those shared belief that bind political communities together is very important, but even when it is carried out in schools, it ought not to be confused with education. Properly defined, education is simply a process of enlightenment and as such is devoid of social purpose.’

I am certainly convinced that the way the courses are structured has seen a pre-occupation with production of a good citizen to serve not only the interests of the institution of training but the overall interests and policy wishes of either the state concerned or the international actor involved in funding and setting up the institution where the international development programs are run. Thus the institution is not serving and putting higher education into its rightful perspective which as Hartz (in Garnet 1984:131) put it, is not to produce a good citizen but to produce an intelligent man, not to inculcate particular values but to develop a talent of valuation.’ It is from this intelligent man, or woman, that innovation emerges that will serve the world, present and the future and work towards effectively dealing with transnational problems.

Taking a stock of how teaching of international development has been taught requires a clear review of different international development programs. What I find largely emerging from the discourses on international development i.e. the way the courses have been designed and taught depicts resurgence of nationalism, and national interest being the driving force behind their existence rather than overall global outlook. Continentally, North America, partly together with Western Europe and some states in Asian and the South Pacific are after westernization of international development, there is

emergence of pan Europeanism in greater Europe, and for Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America there is bifurcated moves; others towards modernization others towards pan Africanism, pan Arabism, Asiatic style and Latin American style informed by the 1960s visions. Manifestations of development programs have assumed the same character and upholding the same interests, values and visions. Those societies finding themselves in resource mobilization problems either by default or design, find themselves using funds from outside their frame of references which assume the same character of interests. The net result is an approach to transnational problems from many and different worldviews making an integration of efforts towards their ending very much difficult.

As a result of this, it is not surprising that some of the designed programs become society specific and seek to address development vis-à-vis the international community rather dealing with issues transcending to meet a world perspective. For example, Payson Center International Development has courses on Democracy, Sustainable Development and Violent Group Conflict in Sri Lanka as well as Disaster Management in the Latin American Setting. (http://payson.tulane.edu/mad/course_descriptions.html). In Zimbabwe, Midlands State University's Development Studies program offers a developing world perspective to world development and is largely afro-centric in orientation. This becomes largely localized, hence society specific. Each society generates its own programs across all continents creating new centers of knowledge generation to solve not transnational problems but specific society centered ones. However, I am not dispelling the fact the solution to these problems begins at the local level then moving to a higher level but that will only be functional if there exists a concerted coordination across all societies to achieve one overall noble goal; international

development, defined in the same philosophical, theoretical, conceptual and strategic doctrine frame of reference.

There has been the emergence of cooperative tendencies between societies in international development particularly Western and those in the developing world. For example,

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is a Crown corporation created by the Parliament of Canada in 1970 to help developing countries use science and technology to find practical, long-term solutions to the social, economic, and environmental problems they face. Our support is directed toward creating a local research community whose work will build healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous societies. (http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-8513-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

Largely, these become institutions for assistance with resources flowing from the north to the south. But as I earlier alluded to, this is chiefly meant to protect the interests of a particular entity, particularly in the north in collaboration with the few in the south for the benefit a few advantaged ones. Another observation that I need to highlight is that where international programs are funded by the rich industrialized nations, the institutions have only at most managed to act as hubs of information gathering for the advancement of industrial societies.

The Future of Development Programs

Given the above insights into transnational problems and the state of international development programs the question remains as to whether international development

programs can bring the realization of an end to transnational problems. There are still issues that need to be addressed to make them more functional in addressing global problems.

One fundamental issue that stands on the way has been the failure to deal with human interaction conceptual issues and subsequent evolution of their use in practice that tends to override all the functionary roles towards global cooperation. The nature of human interaction appears not to be well understood especially the extent to which as actors in individual society and the international system, they relate to each other. What motivates human behavior and interaction with the outside world should be the basis through which IDPs should be based on. Critical to such understanding is conceptualizing relevant issues for clarity purposes. As Garnet 1984:125 highlights,

“It is not easy to be clear about words like ‘state’, ‘power’, ‘interest’, and it is the ambiguity which is inherent in these and other political concepts which makes international politics a difficult and frustrating subject”

An understanding of these terms enunciates the motivation behind people’s behaviors and as long as they remain ambiguous the road to resolving transnational problems remains bleak. Bringing societies together, more so states and individual institutions remains a far-fetched dream that can lead the world to nowhere as interests seem to be the prime driver of actions. At most, genuine differences of interest cannot be in any way be eradicated by some form of education that may bring any hope for the resolution of transnational problems where interests do not converge. (Garnet 1984:135)

Regarding states and their relation to resolution of global problems, there has been the view that there is need for states to understand each other and the world will be more peaceful. However it ought to be highlighted that ‘unfortunately, it has to be said there is not much evidence to support view... those who hold it are either naïve or intellectually dishonest’. (Garnet 1984:135). It remains that,

‘Sovereign states are here to stay, because there is no viable alternative. International organizations are, to striking extent, their playthings, and multinational corporations ultimately subject to their control’

For those involved in international development this fact ought to be conveyed and understood without prejudice. Failure to understand has in so many instances resulted in international disputes that have exacerbated transnational problems.

Those in the tertiary education sector must be able to comprehend this and avoid teaching for social engineering, as it is not their task and mandate. According to Garnet 1884:133 attempting to do so creates dishonesty in the sense that it will be failure to adjudicate over professionalism. He reminded that, ‘the dishonest, of course, are not in the business of education at all. How laudable their motives, they are propagandists pure and simple, interested in exhortation rather than explanation.’

In essence the aim of tertiary education is to inculcate understanding and comprehension of issues not teaching for action or the A.B.C. way of doing things. At most,

‘Those who work in universities have no particular qualifications for moving the world in one direction or another. Their qualifications for

moving relate to their expertise, to their knowledge of what the world is like, not the opinion of how it ought to be...the business of scholars is to provide models of international system which can be used by practical men of affairs to interpret new events in a way to assists them to make rational decisions. (Garnet 1884:134)

For those who are designing recommendatory courses there is a need to realize that *'human behavior is affected, if not determined by human desires, and to understand it properly it is necessary to know something of human motives, attitudes, perceptions and reasons'*. (Garnet 1884:138). At most it reduces academic endeavors into prescription, policy recommendation, condemnation, indoctrination, preaching, moralizing and persuasion thereby restricting academic function.

Why I also believe the removal of recommendatory courses and teaching is the fear that their interests drive those making the recommendation. They are, as what is happening in current IDPs, likely to recommend policies that are self-perpetuating in protection of their interest, peace and security and in no way going to be addressing the transnational problems inflicting society today.

The future of IDPs and their capacity to resolve transnational problems is largely rooted in the global civil society that will create conditions and institutions that create and transmit common knowledge the common good. As nautilus.org noted,

Global civil society is itself at a critical formative stage. Its diverse, bottom-up networks and organizations grounded in local realities have

adopted innovative transnational strategies to address global problems.

(www.nautilus.org/gps/whatgps.html)

However, interests to transform the world away from those with particular interests and supporting the academic endeavors for pure academic inquiry and generation of knowledge to guide them in the practical world should unite its approach.

Once global civil society has achieved this goal it becomes the breeding ground for multidimensional collaboration towards the eradication of transnational problems at a global scale as knowledge is built from different societies not driven by personalized interests but shared global interests. Collaboration is, and becomes the key. International law is one key course for IDPs and has to be taught to generate knowledge on designing its upholding and strengthening.

Conclusion

Global problems as human history has witnessed are not here to stay neither are they to end in totality. Different generations have been confronted with problems and attempted to solve them in their own modest way. As global human interaction continually intensifies so does the problems, hence the need to design, redesign and renovate higher education's international development programs that will provide a critical understanding and subsequently solve these problems. At most as the author observes, the problems are not adequately addressed from an academic point of view and there is need for enhanced professional capacity for university teachers to provide the required academic enquiry into understanding the world. I have realized that much of the

teaching in international development has tended to be particularistic and moralist hence there has been a tendency to teach to “save the world” or conveniently pursuing certain interests at the expense of seriously engaging issues for knowledge accumulation which will provide insights into addressing of problems. As I seek to inform, there is no place for recommendatory teaching and instruction as it obscures the incisive thinking that comes with critical academic inquiry.

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