

Theology in the Context of Globalization

African Women's Response

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Impact Of Globalization On Women In

Uganda

Olivia Nassaka

1. Introduction

In Uganda one cannot talk about 'The New World Order' without focusing on globalization and its impact on Ugandan women. Although Uganda is a land locked country, a person at any point in the country is no longer locked up by the border lines. The people have worldwide horizons since their interactions, whether social, economic or political, are unlimited. Today a person in the rural area who has a radio can listen to music/news bulletin from Washington DC. Those in the city have access to information provided on the Internet. Even that which was a taboo to listen to is now open for aural visual consumption. Some of these things may seem to be fascinating but at the same time globalization has also become a nightmare and a threat to humanity. Reflection about this brought in mind a Kiganda folk tale, in which a handsome rich man married a village beauty.

The village beauty thought that she would live happily there after, only to be shocked when the handsome man turned into a beast and started eating up some of the village beauty's parts. This picture implies that when we are talking about 'The New World Order', globalization and its impact on the women in Uganda cannot be ignored.

Globalization and its policies has affected Ugandan women at different levels, social, economic and political. Whether it has redeemed women or thrown them in the global abyss is what is critically explored in this chapter. The chapter also reflects on how theologians can authentically talk about the new world order. Because there are a variety of issues raised by globalization, and given the diverse experience of women depending on their social location, the reflections on this chapter are based on the experience of the rural woman in Uganda.

2. Globalization and the rural women in Uganda

The rural woman in Uganda is an important figure in the nation although she is always marginalized. They are the chief producers in agriculture and contributes 53% of the GDP according to the World Development Report. These include produce for home consumption and export. The rural women are basically illiterate. In 1995, 50% of Uganda's female adults were reported to be illiterate (World Bank report 1998/99) and three quarters of these are rural women. The women are poor and are exposed to preventable health hazards. The irony is that this type of women still exist amidst the negative effects of globalization. In order for us to get a better picture of the rural women's experience under the globalization waves, her experience in the agricultural sector and the universal education programmes are dealt with.

3. The experience of women in agriculture

It is the World Bank's and other organization's interests to develop the rural poor by improving on the quantity and quality of their produce (World Bank report 98/99:123.) For the case of Uganda which is agro-based, such efforts point at the agricultural sector. This is where the rural woman is most active.

The programmes put in place include providing hybrid seeds of high-yielding varieties. These seeds may seem to provide an answer to rural poverty, but at the same time, they have proved to be a disappointment to the rural women. First they need a lot of care including fertilizers and pesticides and they cannot stand the unstable climatic changes in Uganda. The women who, in most cases, do not own land or have access to loans and other facilities have failed to manage these crops. This is because they cannot afford the pesticides. Given the fact that some are illiterate, those who may afford these chemicals cannot even read the instructions. Some of the crops like maize, cannot be sustained for long. After harvesting, one needs to have some preservatives to store them for future use or to sell them for profit in the right season. Ironically, these chemicals are not meant to benefit the Ugandan women farmers but to provide market for the producers of these chemicals.

A widow Mrs. Lutimba of Mityana who was interviewed had this to say when lamenting over colonial coffee one of the hybrid variety:

This crop is an evil. I cut down my local coffee trees and invested in this new crop and instead of benefiting me; it has become a learning station for my neighbours. I warn them never to rash in for new things.

Here is a case of global capitalists setting goals and priorities for their own selfish benefits. They have no sense of love of the neighbour but just create avenues of exploiting the poor. This is the evil in the handsome package of globalization. The world is in the hands of those who control the capital who always ensure that they get the highest returns (Kurien 1997 P. 219).

The rural woman in Uganda is not only over burdened by crop failure but she has also become the target of the global exploiter who continues spreading dangerous information about agricultural crops in order to serve their selfish interest. When they are carrying out this evil agenda, they even do not respect the World Bank. For instance since 1991, the World Bank has been running programmes for the control of tobacco use. These include bans on advertising and promotion (W/B Report 1998 P. 68 & 69). Unfortunately, companies, like British American Tobacco (BAT) have continued to encourage the West Nile women to produce more tobacco. They also advertise all over the country. Women spend much time growing and harvesting tobacco than growing foods crops. This practice is now threatening the food security of the Ugandan nation. The crop is also sold off at low prices to the middle men by the women's husbands and it finally gets into the British American Company. The woman does not even enjoy the little money acquired from growing crops for export. It is given to the husband who is the registered owner of the land on which the crops are grown.

Tobacco growing has not only led to exploitation of the rural woman, but has also led to deforestation as people cut trees to cure tobacco. The manager of BAT, Patrick Ross was quoted in *New Vision* the daily paper saying "The company is aware of the adverse publicity in the press linking the sorry state of the environment in Arua District to activities of tobacco curing. ... This is a global campaign to demonize tobacco as a crop" (New Vision June 12, 1999)

p. 5). This is a case of global powers ravaging the developing world for economic gains. This leaves the rural woman's life exposed to threats of hunger, disease and finally death.

Experience of Women in the Universal Education Programme

It is important to acknowledge the programmes on Universal Primary Education aimed at uplifting the wellbeing of women by educating the girl child and rural woman's children. In Uganda, the World Bank has supported education for all and the enrolment in the primary schools has increased from about 2.7 million to about 5.3 million by 1990 (World Bank: 1998). The programme however supports only four children in a family.

Given the fertility rate of women in Uganda- seven children per woman, (World Bank: 1996) a woman is left with three children to support with her meager resources. The problem becomes worse when the facilities in the schools are not improved to cater for a big number of children. School heads usually ask parents to contribute more funds towards construction of toilets food, furniture and maintainance. It is disheartening to note that such amounts are usually more than the Universal Primary Education (UPE) contribution. When such a situation arises, it is the girl child who is pulled out of school for the boys who continue. If one compares the experience and pain which the rural woman undergoes with that of women in the north, whose children are given the real universal education, we should talk about global injustice rather than globalization. This will help us to forge ways of drawing ourselves out of the global dungeons into a new world where we shall all stand as equal, dignified, true neighbours bound in God's love.

5. Moving out of the global dungeon into a new world

The reflections on the impact of globalization on the rural woman in Uganda, has uncovered one great evil which sits in the hearts of some of the stake holders of the global campaigns. This is selfishness which expresses itself in the human inability to love ones neighbour. This is what we saw in the case of those who are in world agricultural business where people only seek to create

markets for their products. It is the same evil at the bottom of those who give out "peanuts" to the poor, in the same name of Universal Primary Education.

Such groups of people, do not love their neighbours and are imprisoned in the global dungeon of greed and selfishness, where human beings wish to over-power God and possess the whole world. The New World Order that is echoed in Christ's teaching of love of the neighbour (You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:31, Mat 19:18) is not in their hearts. This (love) is what is needed in order for justice to prevail in the world.

The love for the neighbour is the power which crashes greed and selfishness, which characterizes the global exploiter. It is this which crashes the "evil" that starves women, men and children as they expand their tobacco industries in Africa. Above all, it is this heart for the neighbour which Jesus Christ puts in the exploiter's heart and he finally lifts them out of the dungeon of greed. In this way, as Nasimiyyu puts it; Christ transforms their lifestyle in order that they become dedicated to the love of neighbour and the life which puts others first and gives them life (Nasimiyyu 1998:131). This will transform the world and a new order will be realized, where global activities will be geared towards affirming life.

Love of the neighbour being at the center will particularly seek to develop the world by involving the people in setting the goals and objectives of the programmes that affect their lives. On this, Burkey Stan proposes the idea of 'development from below' - People first (Burkey 1993:35-39). With this philosophy in mind, multinational companies and private entrepreneurs will stop selling inappropriate technologies to the poor nations of the world.

In this new world, we will have to focus on empowering the poor. This is where the rural woman will be empowered so that she too, can own land and be able to generate her own income. This proposal, mainly requires women to stand together upon the principle of love of the neighbour and see themselves as sisters. The educated and the illiterate, the poor and the rich should stand together so as to pull themselves out of the global dungeon. The educated women can then help their rural sisters by sensitizing them on such global issues and threats and bridging the information gaps by exposing the

evils of the global capitalism. We also need to equip ourselves on how we can best use our local resources in order to provide affordable alternatives. For instance, some medicinal trees and shrubs can be used to make pesticides and fertilizers. These are even environmental friendly.

Finally, standing upon our Creator's grace and the love of our neighbour, women can be authentically empowered to move in the new world order.

6. Conclusion

We have seen from the above discussion that globalization continues to have diverse effects on women. Some of these are life affirming while a number of them are dehumanizing. These dehumanizing elements continue to push the woman to the edge of existence. This is where she stands to plead for a New World Order, where God calls us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

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