

# **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION – Indigenous Knowledge and Human Capital Formation for Balanced Development**

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## **Summary**

This paper analyzes western and non western worldviews and how these inform the different forms of education for human capital formation and the relation to global development trends. It proposes new perspectives to education that places emphasis on the promotion of endogenous development as a prerequisite for balanced global development. Endogenous development by its definition enhances intercultural tolerance, appreciation of different worldviews, knowledge systems and sciences and thereby contribute to balanced development. The proposition in this paper takes its point of entry from the recognition of the existence of different knowledge systems, different worldviews and sciences and aims at making a contribution to education with a multi-cultural face. The proposal is for national and international educational system that take into consideration these different worldviews and thereby create space for co-creation and a shared globalization.

Key words: international education, human capital, balanced development, worldviews, knowledges (plural), endogenous development, globalization.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Education in this article refers to the system that is adopted to impart knowledge in a formal school setting. I argue that formal education is the means by which people are socialized to conform to the needs and norms of a particular society. Human capital refers to acquired education, skills and knowledge from the formal educational system (Loomis, 2000). An important characteristic of formal education is a curriculum that is designed to impart specific knowledge from particular cultural perspective. In other words education is not neutral and carries with it the cultural baggage of the educator. The pervasive western form of education that seems to determine the world educational system is thus skewed towards western worldviews and development paradigms (globalization/modernization) to

the neglect of all other paradigms. This paper is proposing an international educational system that recognizes other worldviews that will contribute to a more balanced development than the lob-sided globalization that excludes the cultures and spiritual concerns of other development paradigms.

It is the hope of the author that this article will contribute to a global educational reform that seeks to harness all the global human capital (indigenous and exogenous) for a balanced globalization.

### **1.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Colonization and general western imperialist influences has resulted in a dualism (co-existence of the indigenous and modern) in all aspects of life in Africa – social, political, economic and religious. The ‘birth of development’ as modernization after world war II (Sachs, 1992.2) accelerated this dualism by acting to suppress indigenous development processes and knowledge systems in preference for Euro-centric constructions of how Africa should develop and what it needs to develop. Arguably it could be said that the most pervasive impact of this dualism is prevalent in the formal educational system. In creating the needed human capital to manage the colonial interests, western education was enforced where ever colonial rule occurred. After the colonialists left, the incoming national governments adopted the western educational system to the extent that all the educational policies of post colonial countries were and are still invariably based on western worldviews and development paradigms. This has combined to deflect the gaze of Africans from their knowledge system, institutions and material resource base towards western models and conceptions of development. This frustration is vividly captured by a confession by a Ghanaian former Prime Minister, Kofi Abrefa Busia:

*“Over the years, as I went through college and university , I felt increasingly that the education I received taught me more and more about Europe and less and less about my own society”*

In effect, current global human capital formation is based on socialization within the positivist western worldview – economic, political and social logic to the near complete neglect of other worldviews and knowledge systems. Following the dominant western development paradigm of development as growth (increase in production and consumption) and the choices of the rational self-interested individual, formal education is aimed at building human capital to meet the demands of the current development trends – globalization.

On the other hand the development logic of most non western societies goes beyond growth and the rational self interested individual. In the logic of indigenous communities in the south, social relations, culture and spirituality matter in their development equation. For example in Zimbabwe, the shona cosmovision is based on the understanding that the living world is made up of three central pillars: the human world, the natural world and the spiritual world (Gonese, 1999). Thus, in these communities, human capital formation is informed by these indigenous epistemologies. Traditional educational systems exist in these communities for building stocks of human capital to meet these needs. However, these educational systems are markedly different in content and form in comparison to the dominant western systems. The argument of this paper is that because of the difference in gaze, the human capital produced from non western educational system although contributing to the global stocks of human capital, contributes little to the current globalization process because they are not compatible. The tendency has been to dismiss the philosophical thought of these non western communities as having little analytical or scientific merit in confronting issues of economic growth (Loomis, 2000).

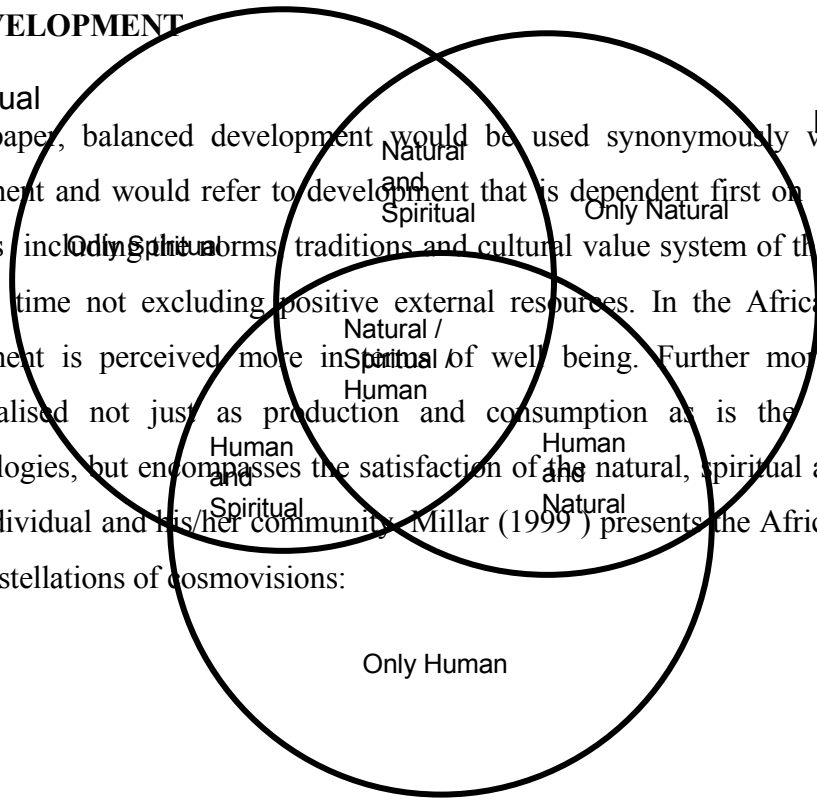
The worry here is that, the globalization process facilitated by the western/global educational system, is systematically universalizing the world knowledge system and weeding out all other forms of knowledge systems, institutions and resources that are not western in origin. According to Loomis, the furthest globalization has gone is to attempt to harness practical indigenous knowledge and skills to facilitate the growth development model.

The result is a development process that is skewed towards westernization with the final output as unbalanced development. The problem this brings is that global development can be likened to a chicken standing on one leg. If something goes wrong with this leg there will be no fall back position. Take the global economic structures that are basically extractive and polluting resulting in the current negative climate change processes. What is the alternative? Take the current global political system that is based on western democracy – if this collapses, what will be the alternative? Take the situation where the mainstream justice system fails to respond to the needs of the people – as is the case in many developing countries in the south, what happens?

The hypothesis proposed in this article is this: “For balanced global development in which there are adequate fall back positions at all times (environmental, economic, political, social) , and in which the potential of the global human capital is fully utilized, we must acknowledge that there is no one knowledge system but knowledges (plural), that there is no one science, but sciences (plural) that there is no one worldview but many worldviews and that all these realities must be given equal weighting in the conceptualization of an international educational system”.

**2.0 NON WESTERN WORLDVIEWS AND EDUCATION FOR ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT**

In this paper, balanced development would be used synonymously with Endogenous development and would refer to development that is dependent first on locally available potentials including norms, traditions and cultural value system of the localities but at the same time not excluding positive external resources. In the African epistemology, development is perceived more in terms of well being. Further more, well being is conceptualised not just as production and consumption as is the case in western epistemologies, but encompasses the satisfaction of the natural, spiritual and human needs of the individual and his/her community. Millar (1999 ) presents the African worldview as three constellations of cosmovisions:





Among the three constellations, Millar presents the combination of Social, Spiritual, and Natural (the middle ground) as the perfect state in the African worldview which strives to be in balance or harmony with itself.

The acknowledgement of the presence of the different constellations highlight the heterogeneity and complexities of African Sciences and therefore engendering different bodies of knowledge's and sciences that should underscore the development of Africa.

The reality of nature as envisioned in the positivist western paradigm has been described by van Eijk (1999) as materialistic and systematic that can be engineered. Spirituality has no place in the western scheme of affairs. Conventional research therefore concentrates on the Social and the Material. However, in the African worldview, research should also be targeted at the 'vertical' which deals with higher order discourses – the spiritual aspect of the African culture.

By default, the globalization process is defined by the global knowledge system and consequently the global human capital formation process. This process is facilitated by the global educational system. Logically therefore balanced development should entail giving equal attention to all the different sources of human capitals (indigenous and external) and finding a common ground for all to contribute to a universal development process rather than focusing on the western human capital that only leads to the current lopsided globalization. This is not sustainable development because it is exclusive of other development potentials.

#### **4.0 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION FOR BALANCED GLOBALIZATION**

Endogenous development refers to development that is mainly, though not exclusively based on locally available resources, such as land, water, vegetation, knowledge, skills and competencies, culture, leadership and the way people have organized themselves. (Millar et al, 2001). External knowledge and resources are often used as complements to local resources. By this definition, endogenous development encompasses the worldviews of

any particular locality where the development process is taking place. A world development process that emphasises endogenous development would lead to balanced global development – a development process that reflects complementary polarities, building on intercultural dialogue that gives rise to mutual learning, co-evolution and the emergence of creative and synergetic systems (COMPAS, Vol 6). This may be described as balanced globalization – globalization that stands on two feet!

This paper proposes that to attain balanced global development, national educational systems including school curricular should be designed to produce global human capital that reflect all the different knowledge systems and sciences, cultural values and natural resources. In practical terms, it means school curricular everywhere should aim at imparting skills and knowledge that is informed by the worldviews and locally available resource as the foundation for building on relevant eternal knowledge and worldviews. This should include exchange of experiences and knowledge among different peoples and their cultures and value systems. The problem here is that most societies in Africa in particular have lost most of their indigenous knowledge because of the systematic damage done to it by colonization and the accompanying exclusive stress on western education. Thus there is need for revitalizing and valorizing indigenous knowledge systems to complement western knowledge systems. The advantage of this global educational system is that it breeds appreciation of each others cultures leading to increased understanding and tolerance which is important for global peace. This is absent from the present globalization process that seems to be intolerant of other cultures and worldviews.

Sophie Style (2001) presents an attempt at global education in the Schumacher College in the UK which she describes as “ One of the few learning institutions in the world which interweaves intellectual enquiry, shared work, meditation, field trips and community life – all in the context of ecological thinking and living”. The products of this education would be much more balanced than those emerging from a conventional institution.

From an African perspective, Nana Kobina Nketsia V (2006), a prominent paramount chief in Ghana proposes a global educational system in Africa that brings in the culture and

worldviews of the African society. He proposes the following as the African Roadmap to reform education:

1. The school must integrate the African worldview and indigenous relationships. The learning process must include transmitting these values and traditions at an early stage, along with the knowledge of why such activities must be sustained.
2. The teachers must be those who live by and experienced the form of knowledge they are transmitting. Teachers themselves urgently need a programme to unlearn, and relearn their cultural selves.
3. It is necessary to teach how Europe has been imbibed as 'education' and in the process has unravelled Africa. Without understanding the colonising culture, it may be very difficult, if not impossible, for the Africans to teach about Africa. Un-learning must be a special subject.
4. Ownership of the school system is vital. Endogenous development can only materialized when there is constant community responsibility for the institutions of learning.
5. The language of transmission must embody the meaning and culture of the society within which the knowledge is being transmitted. African dictionaries of English, French, Spanish or Portuguese need to be created.
6. Assessment of students should include the level of culture and depth of socialization the individual achieved. There must be a strong social and cultural basis for evaluating the level of knowledge gained.
7. Modern technological innovation is not antithetical to endogenous development, but should be integrated in a manner that is based on the way of life and creativity of the community. This process needs to be part of formal education.

As a practical gesture, Nana Nketsia has actually instituted an initiative in Ghana where he, as a traditional expert, takes lessons in the elementary schools in his traditional area to teach children the indigenous norms , practices and knowledge systems of the area as a complement to the formal western education provided by the school system.

On the other hand, the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) has been working towards encouraging Ghanaian universities to build indigenous knowledge and local community concerns and worldviews into their teaching and research programmes. So far more than 10 postgraduate students from the Center for Development Studies of the University of Cape Coast are engaged on research on different themes on endogenous development. At another level, CIKOD and the University of Cape Coast have developed two curricular for training Traditional leaders in contemporary and traditional governance and natural resource management. In addition, another curriculum has been developed to train development workers and government officials on how to work with our indigenous institutions in the context of the conventional governance system.

These are positive attempts at balancing the human capital formation process for integrating indigenous institutions and knowledge systems into the formal or conventional development process. These are good pilots from which we could learn towards a global educational reform to increase the total stocks of human capital for balanced globalization.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

Globalization is the new trend after “development” as declared by Truman after world war II. This globalization is the product of the global human capital formation process as determined by western epistemologies and worldviews. Thus, while the contribution of globalization cannot be underestimated, it never the less reflects only the worldviews and development paradigms of the west. The current globalization contributes only to unbalanced development which leaves the world insecure in the face of any future catastrophes that cannot be addressed by the western knowledge system alone – take the current crisis in climate change. This paper argues for an inclusive international educational system that takes into consideration the epistemologies and worldviews of other non western societies leading to a global human capacity formation that contribute positively to a balanced globalization that is based on co-creation and shared development.

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