

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND CAUSES OF GLOBAL CHANGE

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Summary

Our world is in the midst of global change wrought by the spread of information technology. This change affects our educational, cultural, economic, governmental and religious institutions as it points out their limitations in dealing with the most important issues facing mankind: the deterioration of our environment, chronic social injustice; the widening gap between the wealthy and the powerless; lack of mutual respect for our diverse cultures; and a painstaking search for peace, security and sustainable development.

The tasks before us are reflected in the articles in this section, whose authors seek to identify and integrate the roles of human resource development with the effort to address the earth's greatest challenges.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, the sharing of information has promoted steady, sometimes startling advances in human capability. When information has been shared broadly and freely, during, for example, the glory days of ancient Greece, or in the remarkable period after the invention of the printing press, human development has flourished. The science, philosophy, mathematics, drama and theology developed by the Greeks represent marvelous testimony to the impact of information broadly shared, as do the engineering and political systems development by the Romans. The West experienced a

slowdown and reversal in human development over several centuries when the means and will to share information declined in the Middle Ages. But the sharing with the Europeans of information and knowledge that the Arabs had carefully preserved and developed contributed to rapid human development in the West during the late Middle Ages.

Dissemination of information can be considered the single most dynamic factor in human development. At the turn of the 21st century the whole world was aware that something extraordinary was unfolding. The speed at which information now travels around the world is unprecedented and breathtaking. The impact of this phenomenon is yet to be fully understood, but few doubt that it has radical implications for all major world systems and institutions, and for the course of human development.

In its most general sense, globalization results from this rapid and broad transfer of information. This information may be of cultural, technical, commercial or religious content; it may be ethically neutral or normative; it may or may not be sanctioned by institutional authority.

For many, globalization is connected with the spread of capital markets, or the location of sport shoe factories in places heretofore unknown. But globalization is indicated by other things as well, such as the rise in the adoption of Asian children by American parents, the growing popularity of international music, the meteoric rise in popularity of soccer in the United States and of basketball in Europe, Africa and Asia, the airing of international disputes before the public, and the opportunity for public opinion to influence even military courses of action. Globalization of information, attitudes and values, may expose as pathetic traditional approaches to governance, as for example, the heavy handed attempts by national leaders in several countries in the opening years of the 21st century to stifle political opposition in order to retain government power.

This rapid dissemination of information has resulted in globalization, a conflation of space and time that lays out on a huge world stage the cultural currents of our times. The research, beliefs, attitudes and values regarding religion, philosophy, economics, sports and education are available to journalists, janitors, judges and jockeys alike. The stage is awash with information that dazzles, misleads, threatens, inspires, teaches and reproaches. Globalization has been predominantly a Western phenomenon, but by the turn of the century, as electricity and satellite communications have spread ever more widely around the world, access to information and knowledge is freely available to increasing numbers of even poor and isolated populations.

The technical barriers to this global dissemination of information are being dismantled. The economic barriers, though still firmly in place, are beginning to weaken as companies subsidize the costs of Internet access in order to advertise their products.

Globalization and the dissemination of information are closely linked, but neither necessitates nor guarantees human development. Human development requires the transformation of information to knowledge and then to wisdom (and moral behavior). The barriers to this transformation process, more difficult to surmount than those that stand in the way of the colonization of space, more complicated than those that block

the understanding of particle physics, are neither technical nor economic in a primary sense, but lie within the human heart. The varieties of belief, the reverence for the ways of our familial and political ancestors, the environments that shape our political and religious attitudes, are common ingredients in the make-up of these barriers. Fear of change, fear of loss of dominance or influence and loss of hope in the ability of man to rise above his baseness form the personal roots of these barriers.

The centrality of knowledge to human development is evident in the collection of essays that follows. These articles explore how knowledge can be put to use to moderate the world's population, how access to information can be democratized, how an informed world population impacts on globalization, on environmental protection, on peace and security and on good governance. These articles include reflections on world population growth and the environment by Thomas LeGrand, economic growth and change by John Powelson, the role of finance by J.D. Von Pischke, web-based training by Badrul Khan, the growing sensitivity of business to environmental issues by N. Nissley, and peace and security by Larissa Fast. These articles help the reader to participate in the search for sustainable human development, and the questions they do not or cannot answer signal the gains still to be made.

This article provides a context for considering and integrating the issues raised by the authors, and raises additional questions for consideration. The observations on human resource development and sustainability are influenced by the author's many years of service with the Peace Corps, and with Sister Cities International, observing approaches to human development that are based in mutually beneficial relationships. The experiences shared by many Peace Corps Volunteers are used as an interpretive tool, to examine issues raised by the contributors to this section.

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Biographical Sketch

Peter Loan is an international educator and HRD consultant who lives in Hyattsville, MD. He has lived and worked in more than 40 countries and four continents around the world. His career has focused on international collaboration for the development of human resources. As International Grants Director for Sister Cities International he facilitated cooperative efforts of more than 200 international partnerships to improve community water, power, environmental and health systems; as Regional Director with the Peace Corps, he oversaw the training, placement and support of thousands of volunteer collaborators in African village development projects. He is co-author of *HRD in the Age of Globalization: a Practical Guide to Workplace Learning in the Third Millennium* (Perseus, 2004); and co-author of *Manger as Mentor* (Praeger, 2005).