

GLOBALIZATION AND THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The central aim of this paper is to critically assess the benefits of globalization arguing that while globalization has played a crucial role in developing the world social, political economic system, it has not been able to sustain the development that meets the needs of most developing countries. Section one of this paper represents the introductory piece while section two conceptualizes globalization from Wallestein's perspective as a background to why globalization has not been helpful in achieving or sustaining the desired developmental goals of most African countries. In addition, the paper discusses some of the obvious gains that can arguably be attributed to the process of globalization in terms of economic, cultural, political and technological advancements in communication and transportation. This is followed with a critical analysis of how the process of globalization has led to global inequalities among nation-states. This paper concludes that globalization has impacted on all nations, however, the experiences of each society differs by virtue of their geographical location and historical context.

Keywords: Globalisation, Interconnection, Economic, Communication, Sustainability, Culture and Development.

INTRODUCTION

Today, globalization is one of the most widely used terms in debates on cross-border economic, social, technological, and political development. Numerous perspectives that surround the debates about globalization include the particular date or period of time to its beginning. For instance, Waters (1995) informs us that the word 'global' has existed for over 400 years, however its derivatives, in the sense of world-wide, such as 'globalize', 'globalizing' and 'globalization' were not recognized until 1960. According to Robertson (1992), the usage of the word has been academically significant since the early or mid-1980s.

As can be expected, the theories and literature on the subject are well vast and varied. According to Beck (2000:30), a basic dispute runs 'like a red thread' in the globalization literature. As this paper will unfold shortly, instead of the existence of common perspective of globalization, contradictory and often overlapping views each with its respective strengths, weaknesses and bodies of evidence are associated with the concept (Scholte, 2005). For instance, while some scholars view globalization as a driving force towards global economic and social development and having offer greater opportunities for less developed or developing countries to facilitate their development, others have focused on how the interdependence nature of globalization brings about increasing turbulence, uncertainty, social inequalities and unsustainable social, environmental and economic development (Sachs, 2005; Sullivan, 2002; World Bank, 2002).

GLOBALIZATION: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In general, the term 'globalization' means different things in different contexts. It has been variously defined touching on all aspects of social, economic, political, cultural and others. Perhaps the most common use of the term usually refers to globalization of the world economy. This is represented by the liberalization of the national economies (Sander, 1996), and the "widespread reduction or even abolition of regulatory trade barriers- exchange restriction, capital controls and visas" (Scholte, 2005:16). Alternatively, sociologist Castells (1996:92) defined globalization as "an economy with the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale".

Also related to economic perspective is the view of globalization as a process of greater international flows, networks, linkages, or interdependence of countries across traditional boundaries not only in trade of goods and services, but also in political sphere (Hirst and Thompson 1996; 1999).

In the political context, globalization is seen to have rendered the world without political boundary where nation states are governed by political world order. In this sense, globalization is represented by the growing convergence of political systems under the philosophy of political democracy (Wood, 2000; Scholte, 2005). It is also viewed as the "multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states and societies which make up the present world system" (McGrew and Lewis, 1992:23). To others such as Held et al., (1999:15) globalization is described as the process by which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant part of the globe (Held et al., 1999:15). From this perspective, globalization is conceptualised as the convergence of political systems and to a large extent, it is the loss of control and influence of nation states.

Conversely, another group of scholars have emphasized more on the cultural aspect of globalization even though they recognise the economic and political dimensions of the concept. For instance their notion of globalization is referred to as process leading to greater interdependence and mutual awareness among economic, social, and political units (Waters, 1995; Held et al., 1999). Others still put it as ‘accelerating interdependence’, ‘action at distance’, ‘compression of time and space’ and the rise of new patterns of ‘supraterritorialized’ and ‘transplanetary’ social relations enabled by communication technologies, and ‘compression of the world and intensification of the world as a whole’ (Ohmae, 1990 cited in Held et al., 1990; Giddens, 1990; Harvey 1989 cited in Holton, 1998:8, Scholte, 2005; Robertson 1992:8). Importantly, Cohen and Kennedy (2000:10), identified globalization as “the ways in which the world is being knitted together”. In other words, it is that process of integration involving an increasing volume of cultural interactions or variety of transnational transactions in goods and services, in international capital flows, in human migration, and through a rapid and widespread diffusion of technology.

Having identified these various definitions, globalization could be combined in the perspectives of economic, political and cultural dimensions and so defines as a multidimensional process leading to greater interdependence, mutual awareness or an increasing flows, networks, interconnection, interdependence and sometimes, unity of every aspect of social relations among economic, political, and cultural units in the world and among actors in general (Giddens 1990; Held et al., 1999; Waters 1995; 2001; Robertson, 1992; Albrow, 1997, Scholte, 2005; Cohen et al., 2000; 2007). These developments have combined to reduce the duration of interactions among groups and individuals as, indeed, those among states, thereby turning the world into what has come to be popularly known as the ‘global village’, (Giddens, 1990; 1994).

Viewing the above definitions, one could expect that globalization is what holds the capacity for sustaining the global social economic capacities or what would lead the African nations into achieving their developmental goals. However, arguments ranges among scholars and developmental analysts when focusing on some pertinent questions that concerns how globalization has impacted on the world especially when considering African situations in terms of meeting and sustaining their desirable social, and capital assets for development. This can be observed from Wallestein’s capitalist world-system theory of globalization.

The capitalist world-system takes a lead from Marxian perspective in regarding globalization as profoundly an economic phenomena. Wallerstein sees the world–system beginning in Europe in late fifteenth century as a “multicultural territorial *division of labour* in which the production and exchange of basic goods and raw materials is necessary for the everyday life of its inhabitants” (Wallerstein, 1974:347). He analysed the world-system as a capitalist system that integrated different countries into global economy through proliferation of market and transnational corporations –(comprising a set of social relations with flows of commodities, capital, and technology). The explanation is that different nations become interdependent for the purpose of meeting their peculiar needs: such as fuel, food, and protection. This economic relationship however led to the division of the world into three types of geographical regions or states: the core states, peripheral states and semi-peripheral states .Core states include well developed part of the world which are rich in capital-intensive production, higher skills and possess strong economic and political structures which make them to control other countries’ economies to their maximum benefits. The peripheral regions are the less developed countries mainly identified by low-skills, extraction of raw materials and labour-intensive production. They are the poor, exploited

nations, generally described as the marginalized majority world (Rodney, 1972; Potter et al., 2008). Meanwhile, the semi-peripheral states are relatively strong and powerful with a middle-class stratum in between the two above extremes. They are however economically and technological dependent on the upper-class or core states. Thus, capitalism is regarded as efficient production system which allocates power to those who control production.

As Wallerstein (1974;1980 also cited in Cohen et al., 2007) argues, the world system expand across the globe, as the core states exerts their influence on integrating other nations to partake in the world economy y. He shares similar perspective of the dependency theory (a neo-Marxist explanation of the development process) which sees the world social relations and development as highly unequal. According to the dependency school of thought, there are unequal exchange relationships between the developed, capitalist states and the poor, developing ones(Frank, 1976). As he further argues, the embodied inequality of the colonial powers and their colonies are highly unequal and even though the colonies became independent, the inequalities did not disappear. In similar vein, Wallerstein insist that powerful countries like US, Europe and Japan continued to dominate the poor, and developing countries through the capitalist systems of power and through endless accumulation of capital (Wallerstein, 1980).

While Wallerstein theory has been recognised for its contribution to the analysis of the social process that led human society to the world-system (Foster-Carter, 1996), he has been well criticised over some of its basic ideas. One of those criticisms is his overwhelming focus on economic or material determinism with little attention to culture (Robertson, 1992). As Robertson argues globalization is not all about the emergence of global economy, but about how cultures are exchanged along with commodities.

In addition, Waters (1995) does not seem to accept the world-system as a globalization theory. He argues that for globalization to occur, the argument has to “account for the incorporation of all states into capitalist world-system and of the integration of politics and cultures by virtue of that expansion”. In this respect, we think the world is leading to that direction. However, it seems to me that though the ideology of capitalist and democracy have not dispersed to every corners of the world yet, the increasing openness of China, the reunification of Germany, the collapse of Russia, the expansion of western culture confirm that this is a triumph of capitalist democracy and the world is converging to a single system.

Meanwhile, Giddens (1990) offers a theory that links globalisation much more specifically to modernity-as the solidification of the nation state under capitalism and to what Waters (1995:48) refers to nation-state’s “administrative competence” characterised or achieved through surveillance and industrialized military order. As Giddens(1990) asserted, social relations has become stretched and globalised, such that “modern organisations are able to connect with local and the global in ways which would have been unthinkable in more traditional society and in doing so indirectly affect the lives of millions of people” (pg 20). Similar to Wallerstein’s argument, Giddens view globalisation as based on economic system dominated by transnational corporations characterised by “single market for commodities, labour and capital” (cited in Waters, 1995:51). Importantly, Giddens (1990), asserted that the late twentieth century was marked by a highly industrialised, rationalised and commodified nation–states, which facilitated what he refers to the “lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across time and space” (Pg 21). His argument suggests that globalisation is a direct consequence of three dynamics of modernity, separation of time and space, disembedding mechanism and institutional reflexivity.

Giddens' idea has been acknowledged for his important contribution; however his analysis has also attracted various criticisms. One of such criticisms identified with Giddens idea is Rosenberg's (2000), who insist that Giddens offers a confusing idea by his analysis of globalisation as a process rather than an outcome. He argues, "globalisation as an outcome cannot be explained by invoking globalisation as a process tending towards that outcome" (Rosenberg, 2000:2).

Generally, globalization has been argued as a major force which provides key contributions to global progress and prosperity. Globalization has been seen as having raised productivity and employment, increased standard of living, transformed communication and information systems, fostered competition, boosted global economic growth and interdependencies through trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows as well as facilitated scientific discoveries which help people to live longer and healthier lives (DFID, 2000; World Bank, 2002). From the political domain, it has also been considered as promoting international corporations, migration and remittances flows as well as provided basis for a global awareness, where crucial instruments like the Millennium Development Goals and the agenda of G-20 have flourished (World Bank, 2002a, 2002b).

However these aforementioned benefits has remained hotly contested issues in the debate of globalization particularly as it affects crucial developmental indicators such as equity, economic stability, and poverty reduction within countries and states that constitute the international system. One of the most important questions in the international debate on globalization is the extent to which globalization has led positive development to the different parts of the world or who benefited in the process?

This paper attends to this question by examining some gains or benefits identifiable with globalization as well as its negative consequences from the perspectives of economic, political, cultural and technological developments as it affects different parts of the world today, especially Africa. Although these various perspectives seem to be inseparable, this paper attempts to explain them on separate accounts.

SOME APPARENT BENEFITS OF GLOBALIZATION

Economic Dimension

One of the major gains associated with globalization is the wide-ranging reductions in barriers to the movement of capital, goods, and services and the increasing specialization in production chains. Globalization has led to greater flow in the international economy, integration of markets on a worldwide basis and movement towards a borderless world from which different countries benefits (Wolf 2001 cited in Kiely, 2005).

This is further reflected in the greater acceptance of free market which promotes economic activities or leading to rapid expansion in trade, -the free flow of capital which made up of foreign investment in different forms and operations of transnational enterprises across national boundaries in a way and speed never experienced before in world history (Olukoshi, 2004). As empirical evident suggest, many developing countries has benefited in lending and borrowing activities from international organisations such as IMF and World Bank and the participation of foreign investors in strengthening countries local financial system (Kiely, 2005). For example, the IMF has played a key role in providing support to nations that have experienced instabilities such as supporting Mexico during the peso crisis and its agreement to South Korea during the East Asia financial crisis. In addition, one of the transitional economies that has greatly benefited from globalization in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) is China (Hirst and Thompson, 1999; Wolf, 2004; Schott, 2007). It has been reported that "China has been growing rapidly since 1978. In the 1980s Chinese growth

averaged 9.3 percent per annum and during 1990-6, 10.1 percent. This is the highest in the Asia –pacific region. China had domestic savings rates of 39.3 percent of GDP per annum in 1990-4-again highest in a region of high savers. China was the largest single recipient of FDI in the 1990s, being second only to the US on a whole scale”, (pg. 155). According to Fishman (2006:1), China has benefited from international trade, for instance, the term “made in China” is as universal as money. This can be observed in the way the country has been able to develop its economy through rapid expansion in trade such as in oil and gas supply with Saudi Arabia, Russia companies, exports of computers with Chinese brand names, and production of goods such as clothing, leather products among others thereby influencing the lives of consumers, employees and citizens all over the world, (Fishman, 2006).

Further, it has also been claimed that globalization has reduced the level of poverty across the world (Wolf 2001 cf Kiely, 2002; World Bank, 2002a). According to World Bank accounts (2002a:30), the level of absolute poverty and income inequality has fallen in the last twenty years as a result of ‘good globalization policies’. From this account, the integration of the world economy into single market provides opportunities for different countries especially the developing nations to improve their economic status. Evidently, it has been reported that the number of people living in absolute poverty reduced from 1.8 billion in 1980 to 1.4 billion in 1998, this suggest a reduction of about 28% of people living in absolute poverty (World Bank, 2001 cited in Kiely, 2005; World Bank, 2002a).

It is remarkable to note that while the above benefits are often cited to celebrate the positive impacts of globalization; further empirical evidence suggests that the trend of such development varies according to geographical regions of the world. Across the developing world for example, about 1.2 billion people representing 1.2 per cent of the population were reported to be living below the poverty line of US\$1.0 a day in 1993 purchasing power parity terms (Olukoshi, 2004). It has further been confirmed that the number of people living in absolute poverty from developing world (excluding China) increases from 880 million to 986 million between 1987 and 1998 (UNDP, 1999). Arguably it could be said that empirical evidence of growing poverty majorly among the developing world validate Wallerstein’s idea of the world as divided into core and periphery regions. In deed, the world economic appeared to have benefited (with only a few exemption) only the capitalist rich countries in expansion of trade investments and accumulation of wealth while the economy of the periphery countries (the developing countries) engaged in dependent and unequal economic relations with the developed countries (Kilminster, 1998). Eventually, this paper returns to this in the section on consequences of globalization.

Advances in Telecommunication and Transportation: Another beneficial effect attributed to globalization has been the increasing ease and sophistication of communication and transportation around the world. Technologies are circulating across all countries of the world and no longer simply in the developed world. Importantly, the process of globalization provided opportunities for technology transfer which has become a major impetus that increases the volume and speed of the flow of capital. Undoubtedly, globalization enhanced the linkages provided by computerization and World Wide Web. It provided easy process with which data and images can be transmitted around the world and most extraordinarily, the internet and computer networks make possible globalization by providing a technological infrastructure (such as computerised networks, satellite-communication systems) for the global economy which enhanced the capacity of firms to acts internationally, simultaneously and with greater efficiency (Fischer, 2001). In addition, globalization has not only led to the increasing spread of technologies but also their falling costs. For example, the cost of three minutes telephone

call from New York to London \$300 in 1930, \$50 in 1960, and now a few cents of a dollar (IMF 2005 cited in De la Dehesa, 2006). Also, Satellite charges have come down from \$100 in 1990 to less than \$1 in 2000 while the cost of processing data by computer that was \$100 in 1975 is now less than \$0.001 per seconds (IMF 2005 cited in De la Dehesa, 2006). Consequently, the number of internet users across the world increased from 246 million to over one billion between 2000 and 2007, (Internet World Statistics, 2007). Similar accounts of falling costs have also been recorded in road, air, and maritime transport. With technological progress, the cost of ocean transport has fallen from 80 percent in eighteenth century to less than 10 percent in the present world. This apart, technological advancement has further meant a reduction of transporting heavy raw materials and unfinished products from one country to another, to a large extent, raw materials can now be refined to lighter finished produce thereby reducing the space and cost of transport.

These developments have reduced the natural barrier of time and space across different countries, as well as the reduce the costs of transferring information, movement of capital, goods, services and people from one place to another. This has been celebrated by globalization enthusiasts as suggesting the dawn of a new era in the world history (Fukuyama, 1992).

Nevertheless, as part of the paradoxes associated with globalization, the situation of technological development in many developing countries (such as South Asian and African) is very different. In most cases, the internet and telephone networks are characterised by low networks. According to African Telecommunications Union (ATU) (1998), there were about 13.6 million telephones in Africa in 1996 out of which 6.5 million were in North Africa while 4.2 million and 2.9 million were in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa respectively. The differences have been associated with variations in per capita GDP of a country. Countries with high per capita GDP such as South Africa, Mauritius, Botswana, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco have higher penetration (ATU, 1998).

Social and Cultural dimensions: The social and cultural gain associated with globalization is especially noticeable with the rapid development in information technology that has revolutionized the entire social and cultural aspect of the contemporary society. This is manifested in the ever-greater uniformity of certain consumption patterns and lifestyles, that is, the emergence of cosmopolitan culture, cultural symbols and transnational modes of behaviour that was not evident in pre-modern societies. For example, rapid technological development in communication enhanced cross-cultural interaction which embodies cultural diffusion and people's participation in a "world culture" (Friedman, 1994; 2000). In particular, people now enjoy freedom of movement, a media-based culture such as internet and the worldwide dissemination of certain cultural practices such as sport events, arts across countries with very different cultures. These apart, people around the world now interact and communicate (in words, images such as photo sharing) as well as enjoy foreign products, exchange ideas and practices. Even in the developing countries such as south Asia, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, technological progress provided consumers in these regions with a wide range of goods and services (enjoyed in the developed world) which would have ordinarily not been accessible to them by virtue of their location or development status (Ajayi, 2004). For instance, people are now able to watch 'friends' on TV, buy modern types of clothing, enjoy popular music, films, video shows, dance, fast food, among others.

Further, the movement of people across borders become more pronounced as world becomes interconnected (Cohen et al., 2007). For instance as Ajayi, (2004) revealed a number of African skilled workers have migrated to the economically prospective nations such as USA, United Kingdom, Canada, Saudi Arabia and South Africa. Such movement appears to

be beneficial with the expectation that such migrants are able to send home remittances, acquire better skills particularly in the area of technological development which could be beneficial to the development of their country of origin when they eventually return home.

At another level, while globalization has been celebrated for homogenization of tastes, consumption and free movement of people across the globe, it could be observed that cultural globalization has numerous negative impacts. Apart from the effect of homogenization of culture leading to a decline of cultural identity (McBride et al., 2000), it has more exclusive process of social exclusion. For example, even though we tend to view globalization as lifting the constraints of geography to people's movement around the world, geographical barriers seem to be reinforced with the control of population movements from South to the North. Despite the fact that the North are the direct cause of migration from other parts of the world, there has been a widespread intolerance of immigrants particularly from 1990s with a number of migration laws constraining immigrants particularly from Africa countries to Europe and USA (Olukoshi, 2004).

Taking a closer look at the cultural aspect of globalization also it has also generated a one-sided transmission of cultural forms, packaged information and consumer tastes from rich to poor countries without a commensurate reciprocal in the reverse direction has evoked concerns about the revival of cultural imperialist activities of the dominant political powers of the 19th century (McChesney, 2001). Moreover, it generates a high level of marketization of culture which has the risk of "reducing cultural concerns to protecting what can be bought and sold, neglecting community, customs and traditions" (UNDP, 1999:33). A more often cited example of such influence is what is generally viewed as westernization or Americanization of global culture (Ritzer, 1993; Ritzer et al., 2003). Empirical evidence of US dominance in the cultural industry in both western and non-western countries is not only being felt in the areas of films, news broadcasting, and television programmes but also in lifestyles structure, ideas and values (Holton, 1998).

Political dimension: From the political domain, globalization promotes liberal democracy. It has led to the convergence of political organizations which focus their attention and efforts on policy ideas and values such as on issues of economic growth, multi-party democracies, human rights, free elections and sustainable developments across different nations. In a way, it could be said that power is being redistributed among local and global players, that is, the role of states has been challenged with the transnational forces covering a broad range areas from labour law (ILO) and trade (WTO) to finance (World Bank and IMF) and health (WHO) which have emerged as international governance structures in handling global problems or in providing support for different countries to reach international standards- in achieving desirable social justice, and good governance rules. In addition, globalization has impacted on the mode of governance in different nations such that when governments take policy decisions, they are not only conscious of the reaction of the opposition parties or public opinion within their national boundary but also to international investors, economic analysts and international rating agencies who serve (as 'watchdog') to observe and scrutinize important policy decisions taking by various governments (De la Dehesa, 2006).

Having discussed the benefits of the political aspect of globalization, it could further be said that it have the same self-centred characteristics as discussed in the socio-economic and cultural domains. We return to some of its negative consequences in the following section.

CONSEQUENCES OF GLOBALIZATION IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

Among the most hotly contested issues in the debate on globalization is its developmental consequences particularly as it relate to the ways it has affected crucial developmental issues such as equity within countries and among states that constitute the international system. As discussed above, globalization has benefited different countries in some obvious ways; however it has equally left uneven and differentiated impacts on the economies and politics of the world accounts. For example, even among the developing nations, the record of capital flows since the late 1980s indicate that African countries have not equally benefited as much as the Asian countries (such as China, South Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia) from the flow of private capital (Orubu et al., 2004).

It could be observed that different countries have encountered globalization with a differing range, and particularly with regard to their different historical experience. For instance, while African continent (that is

government policies) might be blamed for failure to attract larger amount of foreign investments (Ajayi, 2004) in the economic sphere, previous socio-historical experiences of socio-economic transformation of countries such as in Europe, Japan and United States did not happen on the basis of open door liberalisation as proposed for Africa by IMF and World Bank (Olukoshi, 2004). Moreover, the process of liberalization in economic activities such as trade, investment and finance has been tightening up by strict conditions of loan, rules and unilateral policies through World Trade Organization (WTO), International Financial Institutions (IFIs) which are organized to protect and sustain the developmental capacities of the developed world. On the other hand, Africa own economic history as evidenced by record of the 1960s was marked by respectable rates of growth ranging between 9 and 10 percent achieved at the back of interventionists policies before the introduction of Africa into the international economic system which marked the beginning of the continent's development crisis (Amin, 1997; 1999; 2001; Olukoshi, 2004). This can be traced back to the processes that led to the onset of the trans-Atlantic slave trade which resulted in a major de-population of Africa and a spiral of conflict and instability linked to the slave raiding that has undermined the development of the continent. As Rodney (1972) asserted it in his seminar work, the slave trade was the first step in the underdevelopment of the African continent. The experience of slave trade era also set the context for the introduction of Africa into the modern international economic system as dependent partner responding primarily to external dynamics. The theme of dependency was extended further and deepened in the second phase of globalization, which in the African experience, centred on processes leading to the onset and consolidation of imperialism, colonial rule and the existing international division of labour under which African has played the role of suppliers of raw materials for the capital accumulation process in the West (Rodney, 1972; Amin, 2001).

Not surprisingly, the flow of direct foreign investment that increased substantially during this phase, the rise of modern Multinational Corporation, and advances made in transport technology which would have increased over time or at least sustain the African economy were reversed by lost of human and social capital during the slave trade. This reinforced the dynamic of domination and dependence that was typical of the African encounter with the process of globalization (Amin et al., 1997; 2001).

CONCLUSION

This paper has been concerned with a critical assessment of the benefits and negative consequences of globalization as it affects the sustainable development of the developing countries. Generally, globalisation has been argued as a major force which provides key contributions to global progress and prosperity. As discussed in this paper, globalisation has been identified as a major instrument that launched the world to greater level of productivity, economic growth, employment opportunities, improved standard of living, and total transformation of major sectors such as education, communication, information, and interdependencies through trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows.

However, as revealed in this paper, these aforementioned benefits has remained hotly contested issues in the debate of globalisation as it affects crucial developmental indicators such as equity, economic stability, and poverty reduction especially when focusing on the African experience. As this paper argues, while some segment of the world's population have enjoyed the positive impacts of globalization: accumulation of capital and increases their standard of living, a larger part of the world particularly the developing countries are yet to experience a significant rise or ideally, a sustainable level of development. Despite this however, it is important to mention here that globalization has the potential to yield maximum benefits including the potential to reduce poverty and promote economic growth of all nations (including the developing ones). Thus, the challenge for the new century now is to improve the international system of governance and adopt better policies, that is, a truly 'globalization friendly policies' that would lead the global world to a level in which poverty, and unjust inequalities will no longer be an issue of concern.

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