4 · Enhancing everyday citizenship practices: women's livelihoods and global markets

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Introduction

The process of globalization has created interconnections across the world as never before – in economics, politics, technology and communications, even in cultural expressions. It has emphasized the heady power of the market and allowed the growth, often unregulated, of multinational corporations (MNCs) in neoliberal regimes. It has also brought into prominence the shifting nature of global authority in the economic sphere, affecting the political mandate of the state, illustrated by its withdrawal from functions and roles which hitherto had been its prerogative. Countering the shifting forces of the market, governance institutions, civil society and individuals have emerged as change agents, attempting to transform the landscape of governance, politics and the economy. Their efforts have aimed at the integration of those who have been excluded by the changing landscapes of globalization, by opening up new spaces and creating mechanisms to increase their interaction and participation in governance processes.

This chapter examines the dynamics of integrating thus far excluded sections of society within the global economic chain. The arguments are based on research into Project Shakti,[2] an initiative promoted by the Indian state in collaboration with Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL), the Indian division of Unilever, a multinational corporation. The research was undertaken in 2006 in two poor districts in Andhra Pradesh, Nalgonda and Medak, where Project Shakti was implemented, supporting poor rural women to deal in Unilever goods, sometimes building on existing networks of self-help groups (SHGs). The research looked at the ways in which changing patterns of power and governance (in the form of actors, spaces and diffusion of authority delinked from territory) affect the meaning, experiences and practices of citizenship in a globalizing world. The chapter highlights the ways in which this attempt to include the previously excluded in the global economy may have made spaces for the active representation and participation of the various project stakeholders, the mobilization processes of these

different actors, and their associated legitimacy and accountability. Governance processes in today's context are multilayered, and each actor – state or non-state – brings the potential to achieve meaningful and effective inputs into the 'governance wheel' of citizenship, participation and accountability (Tandon 2000).

Towards a more inclusive global governance

The most visible manifestation of globalization all along has been economic, with an integration of national economies through a free movement of goods, services and capital. Alongside this has been increased competition between firms in their search for new markets for both production and consumption. Globalization was seen by some as the means to greater economic participation by all people, leading to poverty reduction and improved indices of development. Greater economic participation has been most evident through the local production of goods for global companies, most commonly seen in the textile, garments and footwear industries. The less common mechanism of economic integration is the sale of global products within a particular region, achieved by previously excluded people becoming a part of the retail chain for large corporations.

In developing countries like India, poverty reduction through the promotion of livelihoods, especially within the rural context, has frequently been initiated through the medium of SHGs and micro-finance. Lack of access to credit has often been identified as a major source of constraint for women working in the informal sector (Mayoux 2003), and the SHG model of microcredit provided poor women with access to financial services and small amounts of credit to raise their income levels and improve living standards. With the growth of this model and its perceived benefits to many rural women, the concept of microcredit has been broadened to include a wider range of services such as linkages to the market, and strategies for all products developed by women's SHGs to be marketed more widely, thereby realizing better returns and enhancing incomes for women. Another route towards similar outcomes is seen as the marketing of branded goods and services by women's groups as opportunities to expand businesses and make additional incomes. Globalization of economic activities, and the subsequent entry of large MNCs seeking new markets, has broadened the scope of market linkages for SHGs.

Associated with this economic development, the SHG model also intended to enhance the practice of conventional citizenship rights and responsibilities. Women, who had been thus far excluded from the

processes of development, would by their economic participation and the formation of collectives begin a process of self-empowerment. The economic worth of these women would improve their positions within the household and the larger community. It was assumed that they would begin actively participating in socio-political spheres of decision-making. They were viewed as the change agents for addressing existing social evils like domestic violence and dowry.

The current global economic meltdown, and the continuing collapse of free-market-based economies across the world, has led to a growing scepticism about this globalized economic model, even in former havens of free market capitalism. The spread effect of the meltdown has resulted in many states providing huge bailouts, credit access, direct subsidies and tax sops. The pinch of the meltdown is being felt by all, developed, developing, the mainstream and the excluded. Export-oriented markets seem to be the worst hit, affecting the employment of many across the globe. In such conditions, those who have gained a recent entry into the markets may be at the mercy of such global shifts without the ability to defend their interests.

Globalization has increased the strength of large corporations, which had successfully made inroads into the domestic markets of many countries, and led to them pushing for more freedom from state controls. In their bid to promote their reputation as an important stakeholder in development, while simultaneously reaching out to a larger share of the market, corporations have, since the beginning of the 1990s, adopted the notions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate governance. CSR is termed as the 'ethical behaviour of a company towards society' (Agarwal 2008: 12), and ideally involves engaging directly with local communities, identifying the needs of community people, and attempting to integrate these identified needs with the goals and strategies of the business. From the government's viewpoint, CSR becomes the company's contribution to the nation's sustainable development goals.

The accountability of corporations and the history of corporate governance can be traced to the Cadbury Committee 1991, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Principles of Corporate Governance, and the Sarbanes Oxley Act in the USA in 2002.[3] Global efforts like the United Nations Global Compact and the Global Reporting Initiative have not had a strong effect as there is no mandatory compliance either from the signatories or the governing authority. Over the years, various businesses have also developed their own codes of conduct and ethics, owing to an inherent fear among corporations of a 'fall from grace'.