

Dialectics of Followership and Leadership in Relation to Globalization: A Case of Uganda

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Introduction

We cannot deny the complex, multidimensional and uneven nature of the globalization process¹ which is considered in different perspectives according to the benefits and risks it imposes on humanity. Some perceive it as widening and deepening the flow of economy, finance and communication, ² global interactions or the assumed connection between peoples of the world and the fading of natural and artificial barriers. ³ However, the perception for the majority in a country like Uganda is rather the one-way flow of all these aspects, for this widening and deepening means for the least developed countries the export of cheap labor and the erratic consumption of global products. Natural and artificial barriers are not shrinking but rather thickening. Cultural influences for some countries are unidirectional, making many of them experience globalization only from the receiving end (mostly of the risks) instead of actively participating in the various opportunities of exchange. Why is this so? The answer I suggest is the nature of followership in some of these countries because this followership has led to various external influences, from the pre-colonial period, through colonialism to the present. Unless followership is active, effective and exemplary, Uganda will continue to go through globalization reaping only risks. Meaningful participation in globalization is hindered by leadership that takes precedence over followership. If the two move in tandem, all people can benefit from globalization opportunities. Followership in this context means the capacity and power with which every citizen is endowed so that she/he can act upon that capacity or exercise her/his power to keep leadership in check. According to Gautam Sen, the major actors in the globalization move are governments and multinational corporations.⁵ In Uganda, governments are a composition of a few leaders and are in most cases not representatives of the general will of the people. For instance, the Over the Top Tax (OTT) imposed on mobile money transfer and access to social media on July 1, 2018 and the constant modification of the constitution of Uganda, illustrate the conflicting interests between those entrusted with the responsibility of making laws, and those most affected by the same laws. The general reaction towards the mentioned laws suggested displeasure with the decisions, but leaders insisted that these are important measures. The question is, important for whom? This is why in all situations where decisions have to be taken to link Uganda to the global community, in this case mobile money transfer and access to social media, followers ought to be very keen and actively engaged in discussions and deliberations leading to such decisions. A representative government demands that the people be consulted. However, this aspect is overlooked or where consultation takes place, it is a formality which fails to collect representative views of the people.⁶ This paper is divided into four sections starting with a discussion of the pitfalls of globalization as an outward approach to development, the opportunities promised by globalization, a history of globalization in Uganda, and lessons learnt from elsewhere.

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