

CHAPTER 1 GLOBALISATION, SOCIAL SCIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT. A MAURITIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Sheila Bunwaree
University of Mauritius**

Introduction

This paper argues that as the world becomes more globalised, development becomes harder to attain. Development here refers not to economic development per se but rather the empowerment of the individual irrespective of sex, creed and race. Economic growth is not sufficient for social development. Many social problems are in fact correlated with rapid growth. This does not imply that growth is unnecessary or undesirable, but it does indicate that explicit mechanisms need to be put in place to influence the type and distribution of growth that occur. Globalization forces people to make choices. Often these choices do not bring about more justice, equality, peace and security which are so vital for development. Instead globalization brings about new forms of inequality and exclusion.

This paper starts by locating Mauritius from both a geographical and historical point of view. It then explains the economic development of Mauritius and highlights the challenges that post-Gatt Mauritius has to face. The paper also discusses some of the glaring inequalities in Mauritian society. It also argues that the neo liberal economic policies adopted by the government can exacerbate the existing inequalities. The various social problems and mounting inequalities make the need for social science research an urgent one. There is a paucity of social science research and the paper concludes that researching some of the social issues/problems can help to feed into policy making so as to make the latter more effective. Mauritius like some other developing countries in the region often adopt ad hoc policies to resolve certain problems. The paper concludes that if social science research is not given its rightful place and policy making with the view of addressing some of the major social inequalities does not take place, the country runs the risk of a major social explosion.

Brief Geographical and Historical Mapping of Mauritius

Mauritius, located in the South Western Indian Ocean, lies on longitude 57 East of the Greenwich meridian and its latitude ranges from 19 58' to 20 32' in the Southern Hemisphere, just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Lying about 880 kilometres to the East of Madagascar, which is the closest land mass, Mauritius covers an expanse of 1840 square kms. Mauritius has experienced successive waves of colonisers, and been a unit within three European empires, the Dutch, the French and the British. Although the island was first settled by the Dutch, the latter deserted the island in 1710 and the French took control of Mauritius in 1715. The French have played a most significant part, first as colonisers then as a local dominating group. The French lost their political power to the British in 1810, but their economic and cultural power remained for a much longer period. Mauritius is now politically independent, but its politics carry the stamp of division that its history has bequeathed to the present generation.

The French contributed to the development and expansion of sugar which was introduced on the island by the Dutch. Slaves were brought from different parts of Africa to work in the sugar cane fields. After the abolition of slavery in 1835, the British turned towards India to import indentured labour. The ethnic composition of Mauritius is made up of Whites (of French & English descent), Mauritians of African descent (commonly known as Creole), Indo Mauritian (Hindu and Muslim). There is also a small Chinese community who began to settle on the island in the 1830s. Mauritius is now a fully developed polyethnic and polylingual society.

Mauritius's Continued State of Dependence

Mauritius, a child of imperialism, is now an outpost of the global market. Its independence, politically occurred in 1968. Mauritius, like some other parts of the British empire, achieved its independence by concession from the parent country. Although many countries can speak of their independence as being fueled by nationalist sentiments, Mauritius experienced a different situation altogether. No nationalist sentiment existed in Mauritius. Anticolonial feelings were expressed by the Hindu majority but the other ethnó/religious groups preferred to maintain ties with the colonising power. 44% of the population - mostly the non-Hindus voted against independence.

Since Mauritius's independence was not the consequence of a united struggle against imperial power, its transition to a new form of dependence has been a relatively easy path. Mauritius is embedded in dependence. It has no natural resources, no home-grown technology, no defence forces, little capital and can barely feed its population. It is this very dependence and links with various parts of the world which highlight the absence of one particular centre

and the collapse of boundaries. Mauritius can be described as having multiple centres - foreign penetration from different parts of the globe impact on almost every sphere of Mauritian life. The economic development that Mauritius has known in recent years camouflages the asymmetrical relationship between Mauritius and its multiple centres. This veneer of development also causes some people to speak of Mauritius as moving into the direction of a 'high-tech' society. Mauritius's unique qualities, and the nature of development that is taking place, may to postmodernists suggest a desirable, liberated circumstance, but in contrast to this possibility there is the reality that the patterns of relationships that Mauritius holds with the rest of the world remain skewed in favour of the latter.

Mauritius accepts capital investments, but accumulates little capital. It listens to the world but tells the rest of the world little. It accepts culture from almost all corners of the globe but does not have a Mauritian culture. Mauritian leaders and politicians feed on rhetoric such as 'unity in diversity' yet this unity seems non-existent. It is perhaps true to say that what prevails instead is a divided nation with disunity in diversity. Although there is a lot of talk about boundaries crumbling down, one finds that boundaries do exist and persist although their forms are in constant change and renewal. To accept pluralism as the very nature of societal reality is to concede the existence of a variety of identities and boundaries. However, our experience has been as long as the economy is strong and people feel that they are having a fair share and are able to move up the social ladder, boundaries thin down and become unimportant. But when resources are scarce and people start scrambling for them, barriers and tensions emerge in a more visible way.

Although Mauritius was a divided society at independence, this division never gave rise to any major conflicts. At independence in 1968, the multiplicity of races, ethnic groups, castes and religions seemed to offer a recipe for social and economic disaster. In spite of these apparent disadvantages, Mauritius has managed to make a name for itself on the international scene. Mauritius is in fact often cited as a model of social cohesion as well as an economic 'success story' but this 'success' is becoming increasingly fragile and vulnerable in this present era of a collapse of space and time. As Mauritius plugs further into the global economy, one worries about the possibility of Mauritius being able to maintain its stability. Symptoms of strain have already made themselves felt as exemplified by the Camp Chapelon, The Vale and Vallee Pitot events.

We cannot but agree with Dahrendorf that the expansion of the global market is associated with the creation of new forms of inequality and social exclusion. 'Inequality', Dahrendorf notes, 'can be a source of hope and progress in an environment which is sufficiently open to enable people to ... improve their life chances by their own efforts. The new inequality however, is of a different kind; it would better be described as inequalisation... building

paths to the top for some and digging holes for others, creating cleavages, splitting."

The GATT Challenges

The fact that Mauritius has successfully avoided a Malthusian nightmare, has been able to move from a sugar bowl to a knitting island, and now speaks of transiting to an information based economy while trying hard to retain its competitiveness in its other economic sectors (agriculture, tourism and the EPZ) does not spare it from the problems likely to be brought about by globalization. Mauritius has to face new challenges. Mauritius is becoming more fragile and vulnerable in the post GATT era. With the dismantling of the multifibre agreement, it will lose its protected markets for its woollen garments. Sugar too which has benefitted from guaranteed markets for a long time will find such facilities dwindling away. The emergence of new blocks such as NAFTA, ASEAN and the European Economic Union as well as emerging economies such as Vietnam and China are additional threats to Mauritius. Mauritius's labour market now calls for a highly skilled, adaptive and productive workforce. With the recent emphasis on the move towards a high tech society, Mauritius will experience a fall in demand for people who are qualified only for muscular and repetitive tasks. As Mauritius struggles to shift from the 'knitting island' to the 'intelligent/network' island, comparable to Singapore, it has to rethink its education system to make the restructuring effective. Comparing some of the newly industrialising countries (NICS) with Mauritius, Hawkins (1989) writes:

'It would appear that one of the major reasons for the spectacular development of the NICS has been the high education level of the labour force. In Hong Kong in 1981, only 10% of the labour force had no schooling, 37% had primary, while 19% of the labour force were university trained or trained in polytechnics. Educational levels are equally high in the other NICS. In comparison, the educational level of the Mauritian labour is considerably lower.'

The present educational system served the needs of the nation well in the 1980s, but its inability to satisfactorily meet the growing demands generated initially by the manufacturing sector, and subsequently by other growth sectors is a cause for concern. The World Bank Report (1994) on Mauritius writes:

'In both secondary and higher education, the enrolment rates are low and there is much more to do with regard to quality. The high failure rates at the end of the primary school career (about 41%) indicates greater internal inefficiency and/or low quality of the system.'

With an education system which continues to be extremely wasteful, elitist and gender biased in the context of a shrinking labour market, communal, stratified and gender boundaries are likely to rise. What is even more dramatic is that education which is supposed to unite and consolidate a nation in fact contributes to the splitting of the nation.

If sustainable development is to be ensured in post-GATT Mauritius, not only should the education system be less wasteful and discriminatory but it should also be less oppressive. The Mauritian education system largely based on the British model remains colonised. Attempts at mauritianising the curriculum are rather scanty. Also, French and English are used as medium of instruction. The examination papers at upper and secondary level are still set and corrected by the Cambridge Examination Board in the United Kingdom. Language remains a major stratifier and eliminator but finding an appropriate language policy does not seem to be on the agenda.

The Various Social Problems

One can also argue that in this post-GATT era with a renewed emphasis on the neo-liberal economic policies by the recently elected government (Dec. 1995), the gap between the rich and the poor is likely to increase. Although Mauritius is often referred to as a success story, some of the existing inequalities are glaring but hardly ever referred to. A study done by Commission Justice et Paix on the cost of living in 1993 indicated that a family of four should get a minimum income of Rs 5200 per month and this same study points out that more than 60% of heads of households earn less than Rs5000 per month. In some cases, this is supplemented by work carried out by other members of the households.

As far as housing goes, about 22% of Mauritian families do not own a house and what is worse, the new Minister of Housing at les 'États généraux du Social' held in early May 1996, announces that providing a house for each Mauritian family is 'a losing battle'. In spite of all efforts, demand will still exceed supply. The Minister then goes on to speak of 'low cost housing and very low cost housing' in discussing a scheme that he is trying to put in place to try and satisfy the demand. The term 'very low cost housing' is worrying since the existing 'low cost housing' is already quite deplorable.

In the field of employment, a number of industries in the EPZ have already closed down. The last Economic Indicators show a rise in closures. Increasing numbers of people mostly women begin to lose their jobs. Many industries are delocalising. With lack of training and vocational education facilities, women and girls will be further marginalised. In some cases, industries are employing female migrant labour from China. It is sometimes argued that the migrant workers work better than the Mauritians but at other times, the argument advanced to explain the presence of the foreign workers

is the rising cost of Mauritian labour. Whatever be the case, there seems to be a certain feminisation of poverty cropping up. In addition to the local women workers having to come to grips with their sudden loss of jobs, the female migrant workers have to put up with appalling living conditions and poor pay. Although the movement of workers between the South countries seems to be relatively easy, movement from the South to the North is very tightly controlled.

One of the paradoxes of globalization for instance is that the free movement of commodities, technology and capital is being advocated, the free movement of human beings is discouraged or even prevented. The North insulates its borders against labour immigration from the South while some South countries import labour from lesser developed countries.

With the centralisation of the sugar industry and increasing mechanisation workers are being shed off. Also, the World Bank document 1994 on Mauritius recommends the defatting of the Civil Service as well as parastatal organisations in the name of productivity and efficiency. With such massive unemployment looming ahead, one wonders whether this newly emerging 'borderless world' is not creating benefits for some and havoc for many.

Although Mauritius does not openly speak of the dismantling of the welfare state, it increasingly speaks of targeting and social safety nets. It seems more than likely that in the difficult economic times confronting the country, the government will have recourse to cutting down expenditure on education and health in the name of cost effectiveness and efficiency. Reforms in the social security system too are envisaged. With a rapidly ageing population, and the worker pensioner ratio becoming greater, the country has to come to grips with some major difficulties. Globalization will only contribute to the derailing of the Mauritian development express. The latter has already left a number of Mauritians behind or completely out of the system in terms of education, jobs, health, housing. There is also a rise in prostitution, crime and drug addiction, a rise in communalism and fundamentalism all of which threatening the cohesion of Mauritian society.

Very few people who have written about Mauritius's success story have actually pointed to the painful adjustment and further marginalisation of the disadvantaged groups. Gulhati and Nallari (1990) are amongst the very few who drew attention to the plight of the underprivileged. In their work entitled 'Successful Stabilisation and Recovery in Mauritius', Gulhati and Nallari write:

"the macroeconomic stabilisation, mainly through curtailment of aggregate demand, involved quite a painful adjustment, consisting of rising unemployment, declining real wages and disciplined austerity. The government persevered with reforms even though it meant a considerable loss in momentum of economic growth and a perceptible setback in the welfare of low income groups. Very little was done to 'sweeten the pill' for underprivileged social groups".

Many of the latter have remained at the bottom end of the ladder with the risk of further marginalisation and disempowerment.

The Pertinent Role of Social Science for Social Development

It is ironical that at a time when the whole world speaks about the need (1) to create productive employment, (2) to alleviate poverty (3) to bring about more integration/cohesion the 3 major themes discussed at the World Summit on social development in Copenhagen in early 1995, we find more unemployment, increasing poverty, more disintegration and various ensuing problems. Under such circumstances, the idea of achieving a level playing field becomes quite remote. The number of losers increase as the winners become fewer in number. In this context, the role of social science and social science research becomes even more pertinent.

If Mauritius like many Third World countries are to improve the quality of their respective democracies, the policies adopted should be more a consequence of relevant and appropriate social science research. In this globalised world, increasing number of poor countries have recourse to structural adjustment policies. The latter have also been adopted by Mauritius in the past and Mauritius's success story is often cited as a model by the IMF and The World Bank in order to sell their economic medicine to the rest of the poor developing world. It needs to be pointed out, however that Mauritius's success cannot be solely attributed to that. There was a nexus of favourable circumstances which proved to be beneficial to Mauritius. Also, if social science research were to be carried out at a meso level to analyse the impact of structural adjustment for instance, one would be able to argue that such policies do not ensure a human faced development.

Unless social scientists make their voices heard, we run the risk of being swamped by the global market. The very problems that many of us often theorise about and expect to be solved may remain unsolved. Globalization then would only contribute to a new world disorder which brings about new forms of inequality and exclusion.

Bibliography

- Benedict, B. (1965), *Mauritius : problems of a plural society*, London and New York: Praeger
- Bunwaree, S. (1994), *Mauritian education in a global economy*, Mauritius: Éditions de L'Océan Indien.
- Dahrendorf, R. (1955), *Economic Opportunity, Civil Society and Political Liberty*, UNRISD.

- Giddens, A. (1990), *The Consequences of modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gulhati and Nallari (1990), *Successful stabilisation and Recovery in Mauritius*, World Bank Document.
- Hawkins T. R. (1989), "Mauritius : Managing the next phase of the economic miracle", *Institutional Investor*, Sept. 1989, pp. 3-23.
- Mehta, S.R. (1981), *Social development in Mauritius : A study on Rural Modernisation*, New Delhi: Wiley Eastern.
- Simmons, A.S. (1982), *Modern Mauritius: The politics of decolonisation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- World Bank (1994), *Mauritius country economic memorandum*, Ministry of economic planning and development: Mauritius.

CHAPTER 2 SOCIAL SCIENCE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: A REFLECTION ON THE ROLE OF SOCIOLOGY IN YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Pembelani Mufune
University of Namibia

Introduction

Smelser (1994) has summarised the uses and value of Sociological activity for sociology itself and for the societies in which given sociological enterprises are embedded. He has pointed to such five roles:

- 1- Sociological theory as a mechanism we use to relate within a single framework the often discrete results of empirical activity;
- 2-Sociological theory as a means for pressing together findings and insights from social research leading to the extension of the subject's boundaries and limits of application;
- 3- The Sociological enterprise as a means for sensitising policy makers and social commentators to specific issues and questions;
- 4-The Sociological enterprise's potential for application as activity utilised in policy, organizational and institutional design and reform, even revolutionary transformation. Such utilisation is not necessarily direct but implies providing insights, perspectives and ways of looking at phenomena in order to make practical activity more relevant and effective; and
- 5-Sociology's usefulness in so far as it enters the general public discourse. Since sociology and social science are never neutral in their larger social cultural context they contribute to debate and controversy in societal discourse.

In my assessment of the role social science and sociology has played in Southern Africa I will concentrate on Smelser's last four roles. I am more or less ignoring the first two roles because they deal with how sociological practice is used in building theory, i.e the role of basic research in the development of the discipline. Thus many sociologists engaged in research aim at establishing and formulating theories. They want to extend knowledge by discovering new relationships and the outcomes of various related variables under different social conditions.

It is my contention that very little of the sociological enterprise in southern Africa has contributed to theory building. With the possible exception of Samir Amin few of us have engaged in theory building research. Many have spent their time on testing this or that aspect of given theories but the theories we