

Netizens Providing Hope for Future Development

In his article "Social Science and the Social Development Process in Africa" Charly Gabriel Mbock, critiques the structural adjustment model of development that has pauperized Africa. He describes how loans were made by western countries which benefited a small segment of African society and the western nations that made the loans. These left a debt of not only the loan but also continuing interest payments which the people of Africa have to pay back despite the fact they never benefited from the loans themselves. (1)

In place of the "structural adjustment program" that brought the people of Africa so much trouble, Mbock proposes a "democratic adjustment program". (2)

"No one can stop the globalization process," Mbock writes, "But perhaps a world of global netizens could help to mitigate the consequences of the global economy." (3)

Will the situation improve," Mbock asks, "if the future brings 'netizenship' to Africans?"

He writes (4):

Michael and Ronda Hauben are of the opinion that the Net and the new communications technologies will encourage people to shifting from citizenry to netizenry, away from 'geographical national definition of social membership to the new non-geographically based social membership (Hauben and Hauben, 1997, pp. x-xi)

"The dream of worldwide 'netizenry', Mbock writes, "is the creation of a global community devoted to a more equitable sharing of world resources through efficient interactions."

Quoting from Netizens, he writes:

A Netizen (Net citizen) exists as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. You consider everyone your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually you live next door to every other single Netizen in the world. Geography and time are no longer boundaries (...) A new, more democratic world is becoming possible as a new grassroots connection that allows excluded sections of society to have a voice. (Mbock referring to Hauben and Hauben, 1997, pp. 3, 4-5)

"If such a global community were to become reality, then community ways would prevail over market values," writes Mbock. As an efficient and democratic breakthrough, technological innovation would lead to deep-seated social transformations resulting in global change...." (p. 165)

"The hypothesis of a new world order," he proposes, "is an opportunity for catch-up of countries in Africa to create "a forum through which people influence their governments, allowing for the discussion and debate of issues in a mode that facilitates mass participation." (Hauben and Hauben,

1997, p. 56)

"The outcome would be netdemocracy," Mbock writes, "with a three-pronged system of dialogue; dialogue among the citizens of a given country, dialogue among these citizens and their local or national government, and dialogue among 'netizens'. The world as a global community of 'netizens', would then, 'at last' possess its long-awaited engine for effective and social development in Africa." (p. 165)

"To Sean Connell," Mbock writes, referring to a quote from Connell in Netizens, "the Net is a highway to real democracy, "a means to create vocal, active, communities that transcend race, geography and wealth", a mechanism through which everybody can contribute to the governing of his or her country" (Hauben and Hauben, 1997, p. 249).

Mbock argues that:

(A)s a new paradigm shift from citizenship to genuine 'netizenship' is the worldwide innovation that social scientists should herald, and not only for Africa. This implies looking beyond national citizen passports, to negotiate global, 'netizen' ones." (5)

Notes

1. Charly Gabriel Mbock, "Social Science and the Social Development Process in Africa", Social Science and Innovation, OECD, 2001, p. 161.
2. Ibid, p. 160.
3. Ibid, p. 165.
- 4..Ibid. p. 166.
5. Ibid.