

Global citizenship and the Capability Approach

Global citizenship has emerged as a trend in recent times with more and more people seeing themselves as global minded. The economic, technological and cultural exchanges around the world or in other words ‘globalization’ has promoted among people a sense of living in a single world society. Globalization is a contested idea, especially when it is understood merely as an economic process and as policy dominance of richer nations over poorer ones. On the other hand, global connectedness has undoubtedly led to the formation of global citizens. It has called for people’s attention to world problems and has clearly advanced their understanding of the social problems that affect the world, as a global citizen is part of a borderless society. Global citizenship calls for appreciation of diversity in terms of culture and race and as well as socio-economic status. The basic assumption about citizenship is based on equality of rights and status. Therefore, persons who aspire to be global citizens should have clear judgement about justice and inequality, in the first place.

Inequality is greatly manifest in the world despite the many years’ efforts of globalizing the world. We continue to live in an unequal world even after many decades of development drives. The leading concepts regarding equality are mainly focused on economic progress alone. The income based assessment might reveal a fall in global inequality and that is misleading because with respect to other factors, such as, health, education and participation, inequality has not come down, if not further risen. In 1979, Amartya Sen famously raised the question, “Equality of what?”, seeking to build a new definition for equality. Sen’s focus is on the capability of a person to do basic things in life. His focus is not on goods but what goods do to the person, not on income but what income does.



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Sen's approach, which is known as the *capability approach*, has renewed the discussion on equality. He pays particular attention to human diversity, which had been missing in the assessment of equality. Accordingly, he insists on taking note of the external characteristics of human diversity, such as, natural and social environment in which people live, and personal characteristics of human diversity, such as, age, gender, physical and mental abilities, in assessing inequality. Taking this into consideration capability approach analyses inequality not on the basis of income inequality but on capability inequality. In other words, it focuses on people's difficulties to realize a life they have reason to value. Thus, here the main focus is on the human person and on the promotion of human capabilities.

This people oriented capability approach provides deeper understanding of equality. The capability approach can be a strong basis for global citizenship activism because it is built on respect for the human person and is emphatic about agency and participation.

By Anu George CJ