

# AVI PERSPECTIVE

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## International Disorder and Injustice? Neoliberalism and the Environment

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### Executive Summary

- ❖ The purpose of this article is to provide a different perspective on ‘neoliberalism’ and reveal the environmental effects of neoliberalism on less developed states. The perception of order and justice, particularly in the environmental context, varies from country to country and institution to institution.
- ❖ When used with neoliberal approaches to international development, the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach may eventually lead to hegemonic involvement. If the First World continues to misuse its power, global justice and order for the rest of the world will be drastically reduced or eliminated entirely.
- ❖ While the article does not deny neoliberalism’s influence on economic growth, it uses the topic of environmental injustice to highlight the lopsided benefits enjoyed by wealthy countries at the expense of the developing world.

### សេចក្តីសង្ខេបអត្ថបទ

- ❖ អត្ថបទនេះមានគោលបំណងផ្តល់នូវទស្សនវិស័យផ្សេងពី ‘neoliberalism’ និងលាតត្រដាងពីផលប៉ះពាល់ផ្នែកបរិស្ថានបង្កដោយ neoliberalism ទៅលើប្រទេសកំពុងអភិវឌ្ឍន៍។ ការយល់ឃើញអំពីសណ្តាប់ធ្នាប់ និងយុត្តិធម៌ ជាពិសេសនៅក្នុងបរិបទបរិស្ថាន គឺមានភាពខុសគ្នាពីប្រទេសមួយទៅប្រទេសមួយ និងពីស្ថាប័នមួយទៅស្ថាប័នមួយទៀត។
- ❖ ការប្រើប្រាស់នូវគោលគំនិត “វិធីសាស្ត្រតែមួយប្រភេទ ក្នុងការដោះស្រាយគ្រប់បញ្ហា” នៅទីបំផុតអាចឈានទៅបង្កើនអនុត្តរភាពដោយក្រុម រឺប្រទេសណាមួយ ជាពិសេសនៅពេលប្រើភ្ជាប់ជាមួយវិធីសាស្ត្រ neoliberalism ចំពោះការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍អន្តរជាតិ។ យុត្តិធម៌ និងសណ្តាប់ធ្នាប់សកល នឹងត្រូវកាត់បន្ថយយ៉ាងខ្លាំងរឺលុបបំបាត់ទាំងស្រុង ប្រសិនបើប្រទេសលោកទីមួយនៅតែបន្តបំពានអំណាចរបស់ខ្លួន។
- ❖ អត្ថបទនេះមិនជំទាស់នឹងតួនាទីនៃ neoliberalism ក្នុងការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍ពាណិជ្ជកម្ម ឬកំណើនសេដ្ឋកិច្ចទេ។ ផ្ទុយទៅវិញ អត្ថបទនេះ ប្រើប្រាស់បទអយុត្តិធម៌ក្នុងបរិបទបរិស្ថាន ដើម្បីបង្ហាញអំពីការកេងចំណេញដោយប្រទេសអ្នកមានទៅលើប្រទេសកំពុងអភិវឌ្ឍន៍។

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## **Introduction**

It is fascinating to learn about the new global order that resulted from the end of the Cold War. Since the idea of order and justice differs from one country to another and from one institution to another, the article argues that they are not universal. The hegemon can influence weaker countries by employing their norms, such as neoliberalism, which may not be widely recognised or accepted. The article specifically aims to provide a different perspective on 'neoliberalism' and, to some extent, uncover the effects of neoliberalism on the environment for the less developed world. In other words, the current global liberal order can be viewed as a form of 'neo-colonialism', especially when the First World imposes mandatory standards for environmental protection or sustainable development on the Third World.

## **International Order**

The term 'order' will be considered first and foremost. Order can be divided into two categories. The international order for the international community aims at maintaining a peaceful status quo or co-existence (Harris 1993). Total abolition of war is not the goal. Achieving this goal will not end all wars (Hurrell 2003). The main objective of international order is to establish it to a level that will guarantee a predictable future pattern of behaviour among international actors (Lascurettes and Poznansky 2021).

It is crucial to emphasise that the international order will require an institutional structure to manage relations among the society of nations to achieve the basic minimum of peace rather than total chaos (Shapcott 2012). This objective can be accomplished only by creating a fair, open international organisation that maintains the international order (Bull 1971; Valentini 2012).

At the domestic level, social order is significant. Here, social order refers to the authority to rule within a state. Most nations are third-world states with brittle social structures vulnerable to outside pressures (Ayoob 2010). When the international order seeks to defend the sovereignty and sovereign equality of all states for peaceful coexistence, it is contradictory and not fully achievable for the Third World as, in reality, the powerful few have far more control over the above-mentioned international institutions and world order (Hurrell 2003; Koskeniemi 1995).

This raises the question of the hegemon's legitimate interests in manipulating the international order for unilateral goals rather than normal peaceful co-existence and the question of the underlying benefits of the international order for the hegemon (Hurrell 2003). If this assumption is accurate, anarchy will continue, and wars might erupt if the unjust system continues. However, they are not aimed at dismantling the international community of states but rather at re-establishing a fresh, more acceptable framework for peaceful cohabitation. One could argue that actual equality, peace, and justice are more crucial to attaining than the illusionary notion of justice that only affects a select few (Nardin 2011).

## **International Justice**

Justice is a broad concept. Simply put, justice is not universal (James 1993). Many forms of justice exist, some of which may be suitable for a certain entity but not everyone (Hurrell 2003). In other words, justice should not be viewed as a universal idea. Justice is frequently linked to

morality and the requirement for actors to engage in a fair and equal transaction. However, it is important to consider how fairness or equality might be measured. Who decides what defines justice is a problem that has not been resolved.

It is important to stress that each state has evolved uniquely and is at different stages of development. Additionally, a nation's or region's culture and traditions play a significant part in determining the type of justice that is necessary there (Kukathas 2006). Therefore, this article recognises that interconnectedness across national societies and globalisation is intimately linked (Shapcott 2012). Some people think justice may be achieved in this 'cosmopolitan' age, where national borders are removed, and universal values are re-established (Nardin 2011). Individuals worldwide are affected by ideas like human rights and the global allocation of resources. As a result, some people think there is such a thing as universal justice (Beitz 2016).

This article seeks to show that the state still plays a crucial role in upholding world order and justice, despite the territorial barrier appearing to have gradually diminished (Shapcott 2019). One could contend that the hegemon creates the vocabulary of cosmopolitan society and that the strong have greater power over perception and world order than the weak (Kukathas 2006). We are in a neoliberal era, regardless of how this system affects every person or business (Broad 1998).

Consider human rights, which ideally expect everyone to be treated with respect globally. However, to think that every state has an equal chance of achieving the stated objective is a mistake. It is not meant to imply that human rights are no longer important but rather to highlight how industrialised countries, which had historically violated human rights but now support the liberal international order, have played a major role in pushing for the advancement of human rights (Sornarajah 2006; Ayoob 2010). Because the explanations are sometimes selective and based on a double standard, meddling in the affairs of developing countries because they are not yet able to uphold the whole universal human rights norms does not do developing nations justice. All the industrialised countries do is to advance their political agenda (Bull 1971). Consider, for instance, the possibility of human consequences caused by the invasion of Iraq or the question of some human rights violations being unnoticed (Ayoob 2010).

### **A Universal Order and Justice: The Case of Environmental Protection**

As already mentioned, the global economic system and institutions are based on neoliberal ideology, which places a high priority on the free market and limits government intervention, especially in the economic affairs of the state, because it is closely related to the ideas of freedom, liberalisation, and privatisation (De Angelis 2005). Additionally, through the utilisation of multinational corporations, freedom, liberalisation, and privatisation brought forth by the aforementioned system have enhanced industrialised countries' consumption and exploitation of resources from developing countries (Durokifa and Ijeoma 2018; Weber 2017). Due to the system's potential to foster financial hegemony among nations, inequality is positioned within the neoliberal order (Duménil and Lévy 2009).

In certain cases, the conditionality of financial support under this system for developing countries merely exacerbates the already difficult situation for poorer countries. One example is the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), in which developing countries must embrace Western standards or criteria to receive the development fund. However, this is a neoliberalist

creation, especially by such global organisations as the IMF and the World Bank, which pressure states to implement economic changes in accordance with their required standards (Lassou et al. 2019). Western states may believe that their market and economy methods are the best and that everyone should adopt them as the standard (Enuka 1970).

Monopolisation happens because of the concentration of material power. As a result, the private sector effectively acts as a safe haven for the markets. Neoliberalism has pushed developing countries to trade in the globalised world, which is great. Still, it has also pushed the Third World to accept private investment in the environmental sector, such as in natural resources or agriculture (Kumi, Arhin, and Yeboah 2014). Due to the lack of government intervention, neoliberalism has focused on the environment for economic gain, but it can also be considered a tool of Western nations to exercise their domination by compelling the less developed countries to accept neoliberal policies (Liverman and Vilas 2006). For instance, in countries like Tanzania, Chile, and Costa Rica, where there are private-monopolised and profit-oriented corporations that may be owned by Westerners, exploitation by the private firms has resulted in logging, clearing of the forest for cash crop plantation, over-use of chemical fertiliser, all of which point to unsustainable practices hidden behind the guise of sustainable development and associated with neoliberalism (Kumi, Arhin, and Yeboah 2014).

Thus, neoliberalism has accelerated environmental deterioration and poverty (Kutor 2014). When a system is market-driven, consumerism increases. When combined with a lack of respect for local management, it drives a rise in environmental exploration to support the varying living conditions of the different nations (Perkins 2017). Additionally, neoliberalism prioritises economic expansion over environmental improvement (Haque 1999).

Developing countries like Costa Rica have been motivated by the idea of exporting goods and free trade to trade away their forests in favour of using the land to grow bananas for export (Haque 1999). Another example is Liberia which embraces neoliberalism to take advantage of its natural resources. Under the direction of Charles Taylor, the president of Liberia, the oil industry was nationalised. Later, the regime changed, and the nation adopted a neoliberal system. As a result, while the nation was in transition, the United States, Europe, and the World Bank closely monitored its natural resources (Hahn 2008).

The hegemon's political and economic entanglements, which prioritised resource extraction over resource conservation, began to crystallise under the cover of neoliberalism. Additionally, one of the most vocal advocates for the liberalisation of the south has been the European Union (EU), which has sought to incorporate the southern nations into the liberal agenda for mutual benefits. It might not always be as beneficial as it sounds, though. For example, in the case of Zambia, the European Union has mostly concentrated on the mining sector and used the European Investment Bank to benefit from the advantageous circumstances and inexpensive labour available in the country (Langan and Scott 2014). These instances highlight the issue of how much the liberal international system can protect the environment.

## **A Universal Order and Justice: The Case of Sustainable Development**

As previously said, neoliberalism neglects to consider the unique situation, local custom, and historical background of particular states (Blanco, Griggs, and Sullivan 2014). Because of this exclusion, some scholars asserted that the West was engaging in 'civilising mission' or a new form of colonialism, threatening the global order and international justice. Even the concept of

sustainable development, which evolved into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), contains the neo-colonial underpinnings necessary for the colonisers to maintain supremacy and pressure the rest of the globe.

Any change or modification that gives a fair and equitable evaluation of social, economic, and environmental resources a higher priority in the development context is called “sustainable development” (Edebor 2014). To put it in another way, it is a development that seeks to raise economic or living standards while being mindful of its social and environmental effects (Mensah 2019). Ironically, despite the appearance that the development will take the environment into account, the neoliberal objective is upheld. Neoliberal policies are followed when substantial development is carried out, leaving the Third World to handle investors and business on their own (Langan 2018).

It is crucial to emphasise that free trade, liberalisation, and global consumerism, which fuel competition and export orientation, are unaffected, but they have managed to deal with the risk of climate catastrophe and environmental degradation so that businesses can continue to make money and the environment can also be commodified and turned into a tradable capital (Cervantes 2013).

Neoliberalism can also result in a phenomenon known as ‘greenwashing’, where multinational firms exclusively highlight the benefits of their products or operations to the environment while concealing, omitting or failing to acknowledge the negative effects on the environment (Bowen and Aragon-Correa 2014). The emphasis on the global market, demands, and consumption results in a disregard for the distinctive local culture, with the Third World having to swallow the neoliberal agenda as dictated by the international institutions (Cervantes 2013; Lassou et al. 2019). This resulted in neo-colonialism, which has three main aspects: (1) physical dominance, (2) changing the way the locals perceive things, and (3) adopting Western ideology as the only viable path for the local economy to take (Banerjee 2003).

Unilever in Ghana, for instance, has pledged to promote the expansion of the palm oil industry in line with sustainable objectives. The monopolisation of palm oil production in Ghana has been facilitated by using palm oil as a component of Unilever’s products. However, it has caused environmental problems such as waste from palm oil mills, land grabbing, and the use of pesticides to boost production. There have not been serious attempts to fix the problems. The Ghanaian government has proposed setting up a group of small farmers and raising tariffs to support regional suppliers. However, the European Commission, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund have all rejected the plan (Langan 2018). Therefore, Western business entities and states’ ability to determine what to do and what not to do on behalf of the Third World reminds one of colonialism in the past. Neo-colonialism is one such phenomenon (Langan 2018).

Similarly, neoliberalism also has a role in the context of ecotourism. Ecotourism is expected to enable the state to advance economically and safeguard the environment simultaneously. However, how much attention is given to protecting the latter for underdeveloped countries? Foreign investment in this industry frequently disregards the local ecosystem, which may be detrimental to the environment. Despite its goal to protect the environment, ecotourism based on the neoliberal paradigm may exacerbate environmental degradation.

Keep in mind that the concept of ecotourism originally surfaced in the 1990s, at the same time as pro-poor tourism, which increased the number of travellers from the north to the south (Brown and Hall 2008). Neoliberalism impacts ecotourism in this area, since mass tourism prefers exotic destinations, and market-oriented and privatised ideas can respond to this desire. Arguably, ecotourism is gradually evolving into a new ‘mass tourism’ type that ignores social or environmental repercussions to advance corporate goals (Cater 1993). The impacts of ecotourism in the neoliberal era can also be summed up as follows:

- Limited distribution of earnings to the locals due to foreign-owned tourism sites raises concerns about cash returning to developed countries. In contrast, local people face the possibility of evacuation and have less access to the environment they have once relied on for daily survival (Palmer 1994).
- Local identity and culture may become less authentic as a result of being displaced or pressured to adopt foreign culture and tradition to accommodate foreign tourists (Brockington and Duffy 2010).
- Growth in land ownership, possibly by foreigners, could degrade the environment due to prioritising individual interests, profits, and tourist facilities over environmental protection (Isaacs 2000; Cater 1993).
- Damage to the ecosystem and ecology, such as the spread of human diseases due to the development of ecotourism, for example, the killing and emergence of a serious animal shortage in Uganda owing to people getting too close to gorillas (McClurg 2002).

## **Conclusion**

Globally speaking, international order and justice are interrelated ideas. Without order, achieving justice will be exceedingly difficult because of anarchy, regardless of the location. As a result, social order is necessary for domestic growth to occur. The experience of industrialised nations has demonstrated that their brand of justice and human rights can only be fully implemented once a strong order has been established. It follows that it is obvious that social order is necessary for continued domestic development.

Additionally, the global justice and order services offered to the rest of the world will continue to be drastically reduced, if not completely removed, if the First World continues abusing its power. The ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach may ultimately lead to hegemonic interference, especially when used with neoliberal approaches to international development. The benefits of ‘development’ and ‘sustainable development’ may be more advantageous for wealthy countries than poor countries due to the inherent features of the capitalist system. Hence, it is imperative to have a firm grasp of the underlying rationale behind their implementation. This article does not dispute the role of neoliberalism in the development of trade and the economy. Rather, it seeks to highlight the unjust advantages and inequalities enjoyed by the wealthy at the expense of the developing world, which leads to injustice and global insecurity.

*The opinions expressed are the author’s own and do not reflect the views of the Asian Vision Institute.*



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