

Pioneering the Human Development Revolution: An Intellectual Biography of Mahbub ul Haq

Introduction by Khadija Haq¹

This intellectual biography offers a unique set of perspectives about the evolution and policy influence of Mahbub ul Haq's ideas on human development. It comprises essays by some of Mahbub's main intellectual partners and colleagues at various stages of Haq's professional career. Through an honest appraisal of the impact of ideas on policy change, the compilation of essays considers the origins and significance—in affecting both academic and policy debates—of human development school of thought. Each essay further discusses and situates Haq's contributions in relation to the larger development debate from the 1960s to the 1990s. In closing, the study evaluates the influence of Mahbub's intellectual legacy on today's global development agenda. Without the collaboration of all the authors of various chapters, and without the untiring efforts of my co-editor Richard Ponzio, this volume would never have seen the light of day. I thank all of them for doing this labour of love.

What I would like to do here is to give an overview of the evolution of Haq's own ideas on economic growth, poverty alleviation and social justice over the four decades from 1960s to 1990s that culminated into the human development revolution. Each decade saw Mahbub learning lessons from his close encounter with the political reality of the day that made him evaluate some of his own assumptions and to refine his tools to achieve his ultimate goal – to make people the centre of all development policies, programmes and actions.

Mahbub ul Haq shaped development philosophy and practice in the four decades from the 1960s to the 1990s. He shifted the focus of development discourse from GDP growth only to people and their well-being, monitoring its progress through the Human development Index. He initiated a global movement involving policymakers, scholars and activists who adopted his innovative ideas for people-centric development where education, health,

¹ KH introduction of the book at the New York launch by the UN Human Development Report Office on October 17, 2008

and political and economic empowerment together became the yardstick for measuring a country's performance.

During the 1960s, at a very young age, Mahbub became a successful economic development planner in Pakistan preparing the highly acclaimed Second Five-year Plan that led to a very high GNP growth of 7%. But when the government of the time was celebrating the Decade of Development, the main planner came out with the findings of a recent study that empirically showed that the benefits of growth had not benefited the poor but had created an economic monopoly of twenty family groups under the umbrella of government concessions and patronage. This was very embarrassing for the government, but it was devastating for Mahbub's own faith in the growth only philosophy. He learnt his first lesson that economic growth policies, in order to be equitable and sustainable, had to be combined with distribution policies and social sector development.

In 1968 October, Mahbub became critically ill and the medical system in Pakistan at that time could not cope with his illness. President Ayub Khan, whose government Mahbub criticized earlier for crony capitalism, took the extraordinary steps to send Mahbub to London for treatment. The President called Mrs Haq to get her permission to send her husband for better treatment, saying, and I quote, 'We must save this national treasure.' 1969 was the year of recuperation for Mahbub. Mahbub's coming to the World Bank in early 1970 was in part due to his lack of speedy recovery in Pakistan. But the illness did not diminish his spirit or courage to speak his mind.

At the World Bank, during the 1970s, Haq started influencing the policies of the Bank by playing the role of chief policy advisor to then President Robert McNamara. This was the time when the World Bank, for the first time, started focusing on poverty alleviation as a policy goal, and started lending for education, health, water, sanitation and environment. More important than Mahbub's influence on the lending policies of the Bank was the fact that while he was in the Bank he started raising the issues of failure of GNP as a real measure of economic growth. In May 1970 at a conference of the Society for International Development SID in Ottawa, Mahbub raised many eyebrows in the international community by declaring, 'It is time to stand development theory on its head, since a rising growth rate is no guarantee against worsening poverty.' As long as Mahbub was in the World Bank, and McNamara was there to protect Mahbub, the Bank's policies did

reflect Mahbub's own philosophy of focusing on people. But as soon as Mahbub left the Bank, the poverty focus was all but gone from the Bank's policies for some time till James Wolfenshon became the president. Once again Mahbub experienced the dominance of political reality over social justice.

Mahbub's time with the World Bank also coincided with the role he played on the international stage on the issues of New International Economic Order (NIEO) and collective self reliance of developing countries. Those were the days of great intellectual ferment among the political and social leaders of the world. Through Third World Forum, North South Roundtable, and NIEO debate at the UN, many world leaders from both developed and developing countries were involved on issues to make this a better world for everybody and every nation. Mahbub played a leading role in producing ideas, preparing papers and advocating those ideas in various forums. The reports of that period showed that the elements of human development were starting to get clarity in Mahbub's own mind and in his writings.

In the 1980s, Mahbub was back in Pakistan, but this time at a higher level of power and decision making, as finance, planning and commerce ministers at various times. This was a government of a highly unpopular dictator, and yet for Mahbub, who couldn't wait outside the country forever to make a difference to his country and region, this was a period of many innovative ideas that he introduced to promote human welfare. Many studies showed that during the period economic growth went up, poverty went down, new resources were mobilized for education (Iqra surcharge); for the first time there was a focus on women's development in the planning documents, thousands of villages got electricity, family planning was introduced and institutionalized etc. And yet, as soon as Mahbub left Pakistan after the installation of a new democratic government, all these policies were reversed, and allocated funds for social sector were merged into general budget. Once again politics triumphed over people's wellbeing.

In the 1990s Mahbub again came to the international stage – this time to UNDP at the request of Bill Draper. All the seeds of human development that had been growing in Mahbub's mind over the previous 30 years blossomed as the UNDP Human Development Report with the collaboration of the greatest generation of socially and ethically conscious economists who were dear friends and colleagues of Mahbub over the years. HDR and HDI gave Mahbub the world stage to propagate his ideas for human

development, human security and women's empowerment. And the best thing that happened was that this time these ideas got institutionalized in the UNDP HQ and national offices, and in many forums and institutions around the world. Finally, Mahbub had a home run!

During this period Mabub also introduced or revitalized several other ideas such as human security, 20/20 concept, peace dividend, a new framework for development cooperation etc. These ideas were developed with several colleagues and fed into the UN conferences of the 1990s.

With this success internationally, Mahbub once again turned towards his home country and the region and set up the Human Development Centre in Islamabad to produce annual South Asia HDR. The South Asia Reports triggered off a great policy debate and public discussion among the policymakers and intellectuals in the region. The force of Mahbub's ideas and the passion with which he communicated those, compelled his audience, particularly the South Asian policymakers, to look deeply into the lack of link between economic growth and people's wellbeing in the region. Without the constraints of a public office, Mahbub started talking about the taboo subjects – the rising costs of military expenditure, the futility of nuclear race, the lack of development cooperation within the region etc. Before he passed away Mahbub talked passionately about what seven independent political entities of South Asia could gain as one economic unit along the lines of the European Union. Today looking at the realities of South Asia that vision seems to be only a dream, probably never to be realized.