

Mahbub ul Haq: Pioneering a Development Philosophy for People

By Khadija Haq - September 27th 2017



Mahbub ul Haq was the pioneer in developing the concept of human development. He not only articulated the human development philosophy for making economic development plans but he also provided the world with a statistical measure to quantify the indicators of economic growth with human development.

In the field of development economics, Haq was regarded as an original thinker and a major innovator of fresh ideas. He was listed in a book as one of the fifty key thinkers on development, along with such greats as Karl Marx, Thomas Malthus, and Mahatma Gandhi. (David Simon, *Fifty Key Thinkers on Development*, London, Routledge, 2006)

Haq shaped the development philosophy and practice in the four decades from the 1960s to 1990s, shifting the focus of development discourse from national income growth to people and their well-being, monitoring its progress through the Human Development Index (HDI). He initiated a global movement involving policymakers, scholars, and activists to adopt Haq's innovative ideas for people-centred development.

The force of Haq's ideas and passion, compelled his audience, particularly the South Asian policymakers, to look deeply into the reasons behind the disconnect between economic growth and people's well-being. Despite holding high-level offices in national and international organizations, Haq never shied away from telling the truth and raising concerns about taboo subjects such as the rising costs of military expenditure, wasting resources of poor countries on the nuclear race, and the lack of development cooperation within South Asia.

Haq firmly believed that South Asia could become the next economic frontier of Asia if acute differences were settled and a free flow of rich customs, commerce, and ideas encouraged. He defined a vision and a plan of action for creating greater unity among the South Asians. He tirelessly advocated for peace between India and Pakistan; investments for education and health for all

people without any discrimination based on gender, income, location, and other factors; empowering South Asian civil societies with training and resources; and work toward an integrated economy in South Asia.

Globally Mahbub ul Haq's legacy of humanizing economics by giving a human face to economic development, and bringing poverty concerns to the centre stage of the development agenda will long endure. So will his concerns for income and capability gaps between the rich and poor within and among nations. **Haq untiringly advocated for better development cooperation for the 21st century, a less brutal process of globalization, a system of global institutions that will protect the vulnerable people and nations, a cut in military spending to free resources for social development, a more transparent and ethical national and international system of governance, and a compassionate society. His legacy is also that he seldom talked about issues without providing a concrete point by point blueprint for action.**

But Mahbub ul Haq's finest legacy is his intellectual courage. Wherever he worked, whatever job he held, he never shied away from telling the truth. He was always fighting for the voiceless, the marginalized, oppressed millions against a system that is unjust, unethical, corrupt and anti-people.

I would like to end this of by quoting a few lines from Prof Amartya Sen, who was a close friend, talking about Mahbub ul Haq.

“Mahbub ul Haq as a person was much larger than all the parts that combined to make him the person he was. He was, of course, an outstanding economist, a visionary social thinker, a global intellectual, a major innovator of ideas who bridged theory and practice, and the leading architect in the contemporary world of the assessment of the process of human development. These achievements are justly celebrated, but, going beyond the boundaries of each, this was a human being whose combination of curiosity, lucidity, open-mindedness, dedication, courage, and creativity made all these diverse achievements possible.”

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Human Development Index

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Origins

The origins of the HDI are found in the annual Human Development Reports produced by the Human Development Report Office of the [United Nations](#)

[Development Programme](#) (UNDP). These were devised and launched by Pakistani economist [Mahbub ul Haq](#) in 1990, and had the explicit purpose "to shift the focus of development economics from [national income](#) accounting to [people-centered policies](#)". To produce the Human Development Reports,

Mahbub ul Haq formed a group of development economists including [Paul Streeten](#), [Frances Stewart](#), [Gustav Ranis](#), [Keith Griffin](#), Sudhir Anand, and [Meghnad Desai](#).

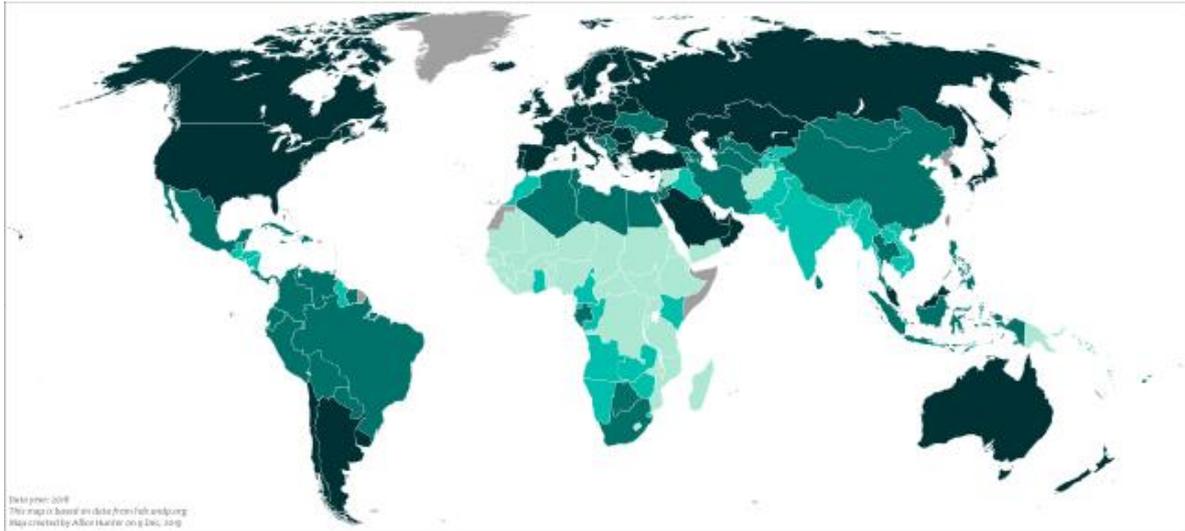
Nobel laureate [Amartya Sen](#) utilized Haq's work in his own work on human capabilities. Haq believed that a simple composite measure of human development was needed to convince the public, academics, and politicians that they can and should evaluate development not only by economic advances but also improvements in human [well-being](#).

Fast Forward Today

The **Human Development Index (HDI)** is a statistic composite index of [life expectancy](#), [education](#) (Literacy Rate, Gross Enrollment Ratio at different levels and Net Attendance Ratio) , and [per capita income](#) indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of [human development](#). A country scores a higher HDI when the [lifespan](#) is higher, the [education](#) level is higher, and the gross national income [GNI \(PPP\) per capita](#) is higher. It was developed by Pakistani economist [Mahbub ul Haq](#) and was further used to measure a country's development by the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#))'s Human Development Report Office.^{[1][2][3]}

The 2010 [Human Development Report](#) introduced an [Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index](#) (IHDI). While the simple HDI remains useful, it stated that "the IHDI is the actual level of human development (accounting for [inequality](#))", and "the HDI can be viewed as an index of 'potential' human development (or the maximum IHDI that could be achieved if there were no inequality)". The index does not take into account several factors, such as the [net wealth per capita](#) or the relative [quality of goods](#) in a country. This situation tends to lower the ranking for some of the most advanced countries, such as the [G7](#) members and others.^[4]

The index is based on the human development approach, developed by [Mahbub ul Haq](#), often framed in terms of whether people are able to "be" and "do" desirable things in life. Examples include—Being: well fed, sheltered, healthy; Doing: work, education, voting, participating in community life. The freedom of choice is central—someone choosing to be hungry (as during a religious [fast](#)) is quite different from someone who is hungry because they cannot afford to buy food, or because the country is in a [famine](#).^[5]



World map representing Human Development Index categories (based on 2018 data, published in 2019).



Check the colour code, left of the figures