

Mahbub ul Haq: Pakistan's Growth Pioneer

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Pakistan's Second Five Year Plan 1960-65 was acclaimed the world over as a great growth story. The man behind it was Mahbub ul Haq. With impeccable academic credentials – GC, Lahore, Cambridge, Yale and Harvard – Dr Haq quickly rose to be the Chief Economist at the Planning Commission in the 1960s. In his first published book, he famously advanced a functional justification for inequality for take-off into high growth. “The road to eventual equalities may inevitably lie through initial inequalities. The time for a Keynesian type somersault is not just yet.” In making the case for a relentless pursuit of growth, he was supported by the Harvard Advisory Group (HAG) led by Gustav Papanek, who opined: “There is no obvious reason why Pakistan's growth should not continue to accelerate.” History recorded otherwise. Mahbub ul Haq was the first to admit the weak foundations of growth: “[I]n 1968, while the international world was still applauding Pakistan as a model of development, the system exploded not only for political reasons but for economic unrest.” The road ahead was clear to him, as he went on to pioneer the concept of human development. This writer cannot but repeat what he wrote in 2001: “There is no doubt that Mahbub was Pakistan's greatest and most innovative development policy thinker and the power of his ideas inevitably forms the major part of the intellectual subconscious of planners and economists here and elsewhere in the developing world... there is always this unacknowledged debt, as in the case of a very famous speech by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on Gharibi Hattao.”

Mahbub ul Haq moved on, as all great intellectual minds do, but our planners and policy makers have not. They are still following the growth framework of the 1960s, with some add-ons from the latest development fashions. The result is that there is neither growth, nor human development. Thinking for reform is left to the donors, while the relics of Papanek's “Gentlemen at Work” pick and choose monuments to development that their political masters can use to rally voters around.

