

The Human Development in South Asia Report 2008 title *Technology and Human Development in South Asia*, was launched on July 2, 2009 in Islamabad, Pakistan

The launching ceremony was attended by distinguished scholars, members of academia, foreign diplomats, representatives of various international organizations, NGOs and government ministries.

Following are the introductory remarks on the occasion by Khadija Haq, President MHHDC.

How far has the technological revolution benefited human development in South Asia?

Thank you Mr. Chairman Sartaj Aziz, Dr. Hafiz Pasha and Dr. Ishrat Husain for once again honouring Mahbub ul Haq's legacy.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. I thank you for attending this annual event of Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre. It is a privilege for me to be standing here once again to report to you about the work of the Centre.

I would like to start with my heartfelt thanks to the Governing and Advisory Boards for guiding and supporting the work of the centre. Three of them are sitting here on the podium to launch this report.

First, I would like to recognize the financial support provided by the Royal Norwegian Embassy and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific for the preparation of this Report.

This Report on 'Technology and Human Development in South Asia' has been a difficult one to prepare because of several reasons. First reason is the usual one – lack of adequate data and research in this area. Except India, other countries in the region hardly have any data on adoption and diffusion of technology and the impact of technology on human well-being that one can analyze and make some assessment.

Secondly, in a region of about 375 million illiterate people, how can one judge the impact of technology on all people by only looking at a few technology hubs, upscale knowledge-creating and disseminating institutions, and technologically sophisticated healthcare services for the rich? The new information technology is changing the South Asian landscape from urban to rural, to every nook and corner of the diverse societies. But is it improving people's lives? Are enough people benefiting from its reach and promise?

In 1998 in the second South Asia Human Development Report on *The Education Challenge*, Mahbub ul Haq had lamented that “while many developing countries are seeking technologies of the future, several countries in South Asia are stuck with technologies of the past.” Since then there has been a significant change in this situation for all South Asian countries. In India, particularly, the application of technology in many areas has increased the country’s output and productivity, and improved employment prospects of the educated and skilled population.

Globalization has changed the face of South Asia. Many good things are happening from more and better schools, hospitals, roads, to employment opportunities in many new fields. Most countries can now boast of technological institutes and universities and exportable income from outsourcing activities. But this new South Asia has left many people behind – those who are illiterate, out of school, in poor health, in poor areas and without income. These are the ones we have tried to keep in mind while doing our research for this Report. The critical questions we have tried to seek answer are the following:

- How much the lives of ordinary people have improved due to technological advance in the region?
- Have the policies for technological adoption and advancement made any positive impact on the lives of the majority of people in each country?
- What future steps the governments and the private sector in South Asia must take in order to make technology, in all its forms, a handmaiden for bringing progress and welfare for the majority of South Asians?

We are lucky to have here two eminent economists to go over these and other issues. My own part in this is very limited – to present the briefest answers to these questions.

Technology – human development nexus: policies and results

All of us here know that technology offers unique opportunity to accelerate human development in areas such as, provision of education and skills, enhancing agricultural productivity, delivering low-cost healthcare in inaccessible areas, improving governance and increasing global competitiveness in trade and commerce. Yet despite great strides that the countries of the region have made in harnessing technology, the vast majority of people in South Asia still remain bypassed by the promise of a better life. Millions of people in the region are still food insecure, jobless and lack basic education and healthcare. The Report has cited many excellent cases that have shown positive results by using technology in medical, educational, agricultural and governance fields. The challenge now is to replicate these to wider areas and other countries so that they can benefit the development needs of all South Asians.

The Report analyzes the policies for technological advancement in different countries and finds many gaps between policies and actions. The major gaps are in the area of inadequate infrastructure development and lack of technically trained and educated population.

Re future steps, to strengthen the link between technology and human development, the Report suggests that high priority must be given to the adoption and development of technologies that are oriented towards human development. These are, for example, cost-effective solutions to education, health, nutrition, and food distribution services, as well as engaging in sustainable management of energy and environment. Appropriate adoption of technology can play a major role in transforming South Asia's poor into a valuable human resource. Technical training and skills can help promote self-employment. Regional cooperation within South Asia for technological advancement has the potential to uplift the region as a whole.

I would like to close with this brief introduction so that the two keynote speakers could get into the substance of the Report.