



# Theory and Policy in International Development: Human Development and Capability Approach and the Millennium Development Goals

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Theory has influenced policy in international development but the interaction has been a two-way process. While theories legitimated new policy, appraisal of policy and experience have given rise to theoretical insights. But of the many competing ideas and theories, which ones influence policy? This article analyzes the influence of Sen's capability and human development approach on the recent evolution of policy agendas in international development, notably the consensus on MDGs and on poverty as the priority concern. It argues that the capability approach played an important role in the contestations over structural adjustment and Washington Consensus policies that led to the new consensus over the MDGs, and help legitimate them, the neoliberal policy approaches of the Washington Consensus remain intact. This illustrates an important distinction between normative and causative ideas. The new consensus has adopted the normative ideas of the capability approach but not the causative ideas. These normative ideas were used to provide a new narrative for international development, not a new policy framework.

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Since their origins in the late 1940s, international development policy agendas have evolved as a process of interaction with theory and research. While theoretical ideas have generated policy strategies, policies have been legitimated by research-based findings, and appraisal of policy effectiveness in the light of development experience have generated new theoretical insights. But which ideas influence policy? For development economics is replete with competing ideas about the process of development and the best means to achieve its key objectives. The spread of ideas can be modeled as a "marketplace" (Coats and Colander 1989:12) where many competing (and complementary) ideas are supplied by academics, to be taken up by policymakers in governments and development agencies, and advocates in think tanks, media, and civil society. The international development agenda reflects consensus ideas that have been taken up by the most influential policymakers.

The recent emergence of ending poverty as the over-arching objective of the international policy agenda is a significant turn in its history (Fukuda-Parr 2005; Sumner and Melamed 2010; Manning 2009). This consensus emerged in the late 1990s and was institutionalized as a political agreement initially in the DAC policy "Shaping the twenty-first Century" adopted in 1995 (OECD 1995) then in the Millennium Declaration (UN 2000). This Declaration commanded an

unusually strong global political commitment, adopted at the 2000 General Assembly which brought together an unprecedented number (147) heads of state or government. The consensus was then diffused by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the eight global targets for reducing hunger and income poverty, improving child and maternal health, controlling global diseases, fostering environmental sustainability, and strengthening global partnerships (UN 2010). The MDGs have reached a stage of internalized norms according to the model of international norm dynamics developed by Finnemore and Sikkink (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2009) and have a “taken for granted quality, and are no longer a matter of broad debate” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998:895). They are used by all major stakeholders in the international development community—national governments, donor agencies, UN and other multilateral organizations, civil society, academics, private sector—as the overarching global goals for international development.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of Sen’s capability approach as one of many competing ideas in development economics, in this recent evolution in the international development agenda. The paper starts with a brief introduction to the human development and capability approach, then locates it in the history of contestations over ideas in development strategies. It then considers the recent adoption of the MDGs as consensus goals. The concluding section considers what this case shows about the complex ways in which ideas generated by academic research interact with ethical values and state interests in influencing policy.

### **Human Development and the Capability Approach—Theoretical Framework and Policy Agenda**

Amartya Sen’s capability approach has emerged as a leading theoretical framework in economics of welfare and development. Developed over the 1980s by Amartya Sen (1980, 1985, 1989, 1999) in a series of publications on quality of life, poverty, inequality, the theory of capabilities offers a coherent critique of utilitarianism and of mainstream welfare economics more generally. He argues that human life can be seen as a set of “beings and doings” (termed “functionings”) and that a person has a range of functionings from which a person may choose (termed “capabilities”). Development can expand capabilities and thus enlarge the freedoms people have to lead valuable and flourishing lives, an idea encapsulated in the title of his widely known publication *Development as Freedom* (1999). Scholarly research on the capability approach has flourished in multiple disciplines, notably philosophy and economics.<sup>1</sup>

The capability approach offers a coherent philosophical framework for thinking about the full range of development challenges, starting with the question of how development should be defined. The central idea of this approach is the primacy of people; their well-being as the purpose of development and their agency as an essential element of the development process. In 1990, Mahbub ul Haq launched the annual UNDP *Human Development Reports (HDRs)* in which he began to systematically apply the capability approach in evaluating development performance and formulating policy alternatives on diverse topics such as international economic policies, gender equality, poverty, sustainability, security, human rights, and democracy.

The motivation that drove this work was not only theoretical scholarship but also concern with the failures of national and global policies to make adequate progress in reducing poverty and inequality.<sup>2</sup> Both Haq and Sen have criticized

<sup>1</sup>See Clark 2006b for a brief presentation of this approach and Robeyns 2005 a review of the critical debate.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Haq (1995), Sen (1999).

dominant thinking and policy as being too preoccupied with economic growth as the key objective, forgetting that the “real purpose of development” was to improve human lives.

By focusing on human well-being, conceptualized as expansion of capabilities in multiple dimensions, the framework has very significant implications for defining policy strategies and priorities. In contrast to the conventional growth centered approaches, the capability and human development approach (HDCA) emphasizes the intrinsic value rather than instrumental value of development goals such important capabilities as education, health, employment, and participation. The importance of growth is instrumental, to achieve the expansion of capabilities. HDCA also incorporates a broader set of objectives including political freedom, cultural choice, and security. Its strategic pillars include pro-poor economic growth, social investments that benefit the poor, empowerment of people, and democratic governance (UNDP 2004). HDCA strategy shares important policy elements of growth focused strategies including neoliberal approaches (Jolly 1998).

### **Development Thinking—A Marketplace of Competing Ideas**

To assess its influence, HDCA needs to be located in the history of debates about poverty, inequality, and the human factor in the evolution of development thought and strategies. These concerns have not been central to the mainstream of development thinking, and policy agendas and their neglect have been consistently raised by their critics. In fact, the history of development thinking can be traced through the standard economic theories that underpinned the mainstream policy strategies and two critical counter-currents, namely the heterodox economic and the human-centered approaches.

The mainstream strand of development thought has conceptualized development as a linear process of economic transformation, social modernization, and technological progress. Although welfare improvement is the ultimate goal, it is assumed that economic growth is not only a necessary but a sufficient condition to achieve this objective. Evaluation of progress relies then on economic growth as a central indicator of success and the main policy goal around which many other objectives are directly linked. Early work in development economics starting in the 1950s theorized capital and technological change as key factors that would drive growth, drawing on the Harrod-Domar and Solow growth models. International development aid was justified as a necessary input to finance investments in the absence of adequate domestic savings. Developing countries were encouraged to prepare medium term plans as a basis for coordinating domestic and external financing inputs. Most national governments followed economic strategies with large components of state investments in industry, finance, and trade. Over the 1950s to the 1970s, development strategies emphasized public investments as a policy approach to generate growth and foster economic and social change. Underpinned by Keynesianism, policy objectives emphasized not only growth but full employment and industrialization (Toye 2003). In the political context of decolonization, the international policy agenda was to build national capacity for development so that these ex-colonized countries could be economically as well as politically independent.

Thinking shifted in the early 1980s with the adoption of neoliberal perspectives that emphasized the promotion of free market mechanisms underpinned by neoclassical economics. This happened as most countries of Latin America and Africa faced major economic crises brought on by the oil price crisis, the debt crisis and the collapse of commodity prices. Macroeconomic stabilization became the first priority, but soon this was combined with a liberalization agenda in a package that came to be known as the “Washington Consensus” (Williamson

1990). The crisis led to a reappraisal of development experience and rejection of the developmentalist strategies of the 1950s to the 1970s. The key argument was “government failure” as expressed by Krueger (1990); development strategies that rely on government intervention is bound to create inefficiencies and lead to economic stagnation because government officials would not allocate resources on the basis of efficiency but on the basis of personal interest. The liberalization strategies were also part of a worldwide trend that drove globalization and rise of neoliberalism as a political philosophy led by Thatcher and Reagan who came into office in 1979 and 1981, respectively.

From its origins in the 1950s, this mainstream approach has been criticized from several perspectives. This literature can be grouped into two strands. The first, the heterodox economic critique, considers the unequal power relationship between developed and developing countries in the global economic system as a major obstacle to development, a factor that is missing in the standard analysis. The critique originated in the UN in New York and Latin America as well as among academic economists and social scientists in Latin America who argued that the slow pace of growth and transformation in the developing countries could be explained by the structure of the global economy. Cardoso, Prebisch, Sunkel, and others developed Structuralism and Dependencia theories that argued the underdevelopment of the South was rooted in the colonial economic system in which colonized countries depended on exporting primary commodities to serve growth in the colonizing countries. They advocated reforms in the global economic system to address constraints, such as, market access, volatility in world commodity prices, the impact of foreign investments on employment and technology transfer. These policy agendas have been at the centre of developing country positions in UN and other international economic negotiations and were formalized as the New International Economic Order under the Second UN Development Decade launched in the 1970. At the national level, they advocated development strategies known as “Import Substitution Industrialization” focusing on industrialization aimed at domestic markets, which was widely followed by Latin American countries during the 1960s and into the early 1980s.

The economic crisis of the 1980s brought an end to these strategies. But heterodox economic criticism of mainstream policies have continued to raise issue with the global political power imbalances that lead to unequal voice and outcomes in global economic governance. Stiglitz (2002), Chang (2007), Ocampo, Rada, and Taylor (2009) and a host of other economists argue for reforms in multilateral rules and institutions of trade, finance and technology transfer including more participative structures in global institutions. These economists draw on a variety of theoretical perspectives such as Structuralism and institutionalism, but are not necessarily inconsistent with neoclassical economics nor neoliberalism; they focus on a more pragmatic approach to policymaking.

The second critical strand of development thought is centered around poverty and human concerns. The human development and capability approach is a major theoretical framework in this category but is not the only one.<sup>3</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, industrialization and modernization strategies were criticized for creating dual economies, which created islands of high productivity sectors that did not have transformative impact on the rest of the country. Into the 1970s, new perspectives emerged that criticized the neglect of gender and environmental dimensions and led to the growth of gender and sustainability as important fields of study. At the same time, the ILO focused on employment as a major policy objective and mounted special missions to develop development national employment strategies. From the late 1970s into the 1980s, Streeten, Burkhi, Haq, Hicks, and Stewart (1982) argued that the priority development

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<sup>3</sup>See Clark 2006a,b for synopsis of these conceptual literatures and UNDP 2006 for policy evolution.

objectives should be to meet basic needs of people, such as, primary education, healthcare, clean water, nutrition and food, housing. Basic Needs emerged as an influential framework and policy agenda and continues to be a key concept in development thought. It became part of policy thinking in the World Bank, UNICEF and other organizations but became less prominent as other concepts emerged in the 1990s including human development and capabilities approach, and other approaches to conceptualizing poverty, such as, social exclusion and participation.

These new ideas flourished in the context of the controversies over structural adjustment and globalization. The mobilization protesting the human impact of these policies drew on theoretical works in Development Economics to justify their positions and formulate new proposals. Sen's theoretical work on capabilities was particularly helpful and grew in prominence as it reframed the challenges of development by redefining its objectives and setting new priorities. By the mid-1990s, "human development" had become a major discourse in policy debates about development, poverty, and inequality (McNeil 2007). Other theoretical frameworks that focus on poverty and people from diverse perspectives also flourished, such as, gender, sustainable livelihoods, human rights, and participation. These perspectives are complementary to the capability approach and share a common emphasis on people as the purpose of development and emphasized the central role of people as the agents of change and advocated human-centered development strategies that built on pro-poor economic growth, social investments, and democratic governance that empowered people. This range of theoretical work was instrumental in the advocacy against the mainstream policies of liberalization and stabilization, and the controversies that divided the development community.

### **The MDGs as Shift in Ideas**

The consensus on MDGs and their widespread use by governments, donors, civil society and beyond such as business and media reflect important shifts in ideas not only about the purpose of development, but about how the concept of poverty is defined, and the role of the international community (Fukuda-Parr 2005; Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2009). The new consensus recognizes poverty as multidimensional human suffering, which departs from the standard income definition and consumption or income-based measures. This reflects the influence of human-centered theories on the definition and measurement of poverty. The conventional definition and measures of poverty, used in both research and policy analyses, are based on income. Alternative definitions and measures emerged at this time based on capabilities, participation, and social. Although there is still no real consensus among economists on the most appropriate measure of poverty and the income measures dominate (Stewart, Saith, and Harriss-White 2007), the consensus on the MDGs reflect an important evolution in acknowledging poverty as a multidimensional concept that is broader than low incomes.

The new consensus also shifts ideas about the purpose of international cooperation for development. The new idea of helping people, or individuals, out of dire poverty replaces the old idea of supporting countries that are historically disadvantaged in the global context (Gore 2010). This is an important achievement in building global solidarity on the basis of global ethics that bind citizens of countries with the global poor (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2009; Hulme 2010), but is achieved at the expense of national growth and development as the important priority (Gore 2010). It puts aside the policy agendas advocated by the Global South since the 1950s such as differentiated treatment in trade, transfer of technology as part of foreign direct investments. Development aid is justified on humanitarian grounds for the sake of charity rather than on developmental

grounds for the sake of justice. These trends are manifest for example in the 2010 negotiations on climate change in which developing countries have had little success in obtaining concessions based on their greater developmental needs for energy in the future and limited contribution to the problem in the past. These ideational shifts thus have important implications for the political economy of international development.

The origins of the new consensus can be traced to the controversies over the human impact and the effectiveness of the Structural Adjustment and globalization policies in the 1980s and 1990s that had divided the development community in acrimonious debates. The divides not only pitted institutions—such as the NGOs against the IMF and the World Bank—but also individuals and groups within these and other institutions, such as, the UN, bilateral donors, governments of the North and South, and academia. By the mid-1990s, in the face of these persistent controversies as well as mixed implementation and outcomes, the Washington Consensus policies in their original form were increasingly discredited and no longer defensible. Major donors and multinational organizations needed to formulate a new development strategy to build a more cooperative international effort, especially in the face of declining support for development aid which had begun a secular decline starting in the early 1990s. Development ministers needed better justification for aid than structural adjustment and macroeconomic stability (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2009).

In 1996, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) grouping the major bilateral donors published a new vision of development cooperation for the twenty-first century and emphasized moral commitment to ending poverty together with self-interest in a prosperous global economy as the major rationale for international cooperation. Their 1996 publication states “Those of us in the industrialised countries have a strong moral imperative to respond to the extreme poverty and human suffering that still afflict more than one billion people. We also have a strong self-interest in fostering increased prosperity in the developing countries.” (p.1) To monitor the progress, they adopted six quantitative targets—the International Development Goals (IDGs) in education, health, income poverty to be achieved by 2015 as well as the qualitative objectives of “justice, participatory more stable, safe, participatory and just societies” (p.6) to be achieved through democratic governance and the protection of human rights. The focus on poverty and human concerns provided a more convincing and consensual narrative around which stakeholders of the international community as well as the public at large could be mobilized.<sup>4</sup>

The political traction of donor consensus on poverty and the strength of numeric, time bound goals were taken up by the UN and the Secretary General Office in preparing for the 2000 Summit.<sup>5</sup> They included in the draft Declaration, a list of concrete global goals that would build on and adapt the IDGs, transforming them from donor goals to global goals. These goals in the Declaration were then developed into the more coherent set of goals encompassing targets and indicators published a year later as the MDGs. MDGs provided a new impetus for global support for a development agenda that had lost political support with the end of the Cold War. It was a powerful tool of communication for development ministers and activists to mobilize public commitment. These goals communicated clearly the purpose of international development and what was to be accomplished in concrete terms, in ways which ambiguous and complex terms like “poverty” could not do. The Millennium Declaration was consciously drafted to include global goals (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2009) that would serve this purpose.

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<sup>4</sup>Interviews with DAC delegate Bradford 10.16.2008; DAC secretariat Carey 2.10.2009.

<sup>5</sup>Interviews with SG Office staff, 2008.

The MDGs are a selected subset of targets agreed at this series of conferences organized by the UN on the major development challenges, ranging from environment to population to women and to habitat. The consistent theme in the plans of action adopted at these diverse conferences was “inclusive globalization,” or “globalization” in which the benefits would be shared both within and between countries. These agendas were also strongly influenced by normative commitments that reflect the principles of equality and participation that are at the core of the UN charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN DESA 2007).

### **Policy Strategies and Aid Architecture**

While the normative framework of the international development agenda has been redefined by drawing on the HDCA, it is far from evident that the implementation strategies have undergone the same shift. National and international development policies continue to give priority to objectives of macroeconomic stability and economic growth, justified by the theory that growth is not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition for reducing poverty. While national and international policies appear to set higher priorities for social sector investments to meet basic needs, other important elements of the HDC strategy are neglected, such as, equality, pro-poor economic growth, empowerment and democratic governance. A study by the author (2010) of 22 Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) found that these national strategy documents almost all identify poverty reduction as the over-riding goal and action plans focus on economic liberalization and social investments. They emphasized commitment to the MDGs but were selective in which ones they emphasized among the multitude of targets and indicators. Almost all of them included among core objective and action plans, specific strategies in areas of primary education, health, and economic governance. For these areas except governance, the strategies set quantitative targets in line with the MDGs. What is striking is the absence of the strategic elements of the HDCA—empowerment, distribution, employment generating growth, and democratic governance. Of the 60 MDG indicators, those that received virtually no mention were those most important for ensuring that growth is inclusive and pro-poor and that development empowers those who are marginalized; <4 out of 22 documents mentioned employment, natural resource conservation, orphans from HIV/AIDS pandemic, women’s political representation, violence against women, and social integration of migrants (2010).

The study also analyzed policy statements of the 21 largest bilateral donors. As in the PRSPs, these donor policy documents emphasized poverty but not empowerment, social integration, equality, and pro-poor growth, the themes that are central to HDCA. OECD data on aid flows indicate increases in the proportion of total aid commitments to social infrastructure from 28% to 43% between 1995 and 2007. From the late 1990s, global diseases and health in general received high priority attention from both official donors and new foundations such as the Gates Foundation. This has led to new initiatives and new financing such as the establishment of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Manning (2010) argues that some of this increase was encouraged by the institutionalization of MDGs that drew attention to neglected priorities in child and maternal health. What is as important as the rise in funding for the social sectors is the decline in support to production. There was a corresponding decline in aid allocations to economic infrastructure and services from 24% to 15%, and production sectors from 12% to 7% and in budget support from 8% to 5% (OECD 2009). And while the objective of PRSPs are to generate growth and reduce poverty, there is little by way of proactive government support for these objectives, such as, infrastructure development, expansion of credit financing, or technological

upgrading. The growth is expected to come through the private sector by creating a stable macroeconomic environment to foster investments.

While the MDGs and the consensus on poverty drew from the UN conference agendas for inclusive globalization, the policy content of most PRSPs and donor policy statements contains little attention to issues that were at the core of the inclusive globalization agenda of the UN conference plans of action. And while it was the criticism of the distributional consequences of the Washington Consensus policies and the broader liberalization agendas that drove the demise of structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s, and the rise of poverty and human concerns to the fore of international agendas, maintaining a stable macroeconomic environment, economic growth, and liberalization remain key objectives. Stringent macroeconomic policies aimed at maintaining low inflation, minimum balance of payments, and budgetary deficits still remain at the core of the economic management and development strategy coupled with strengthening institutions of economic governance such as property rights. While they are no longer conditions in structural adjustment loans, they are core provisions for access to debt relief from the HIPC initiative and from the IMF under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF).

Although the “Washington Consensus” may be “dead,” the basic macroeconomic policy prescriptions for macroeconomic stability and privatization of economic activity remain at the core of both World Bank and IMF lending operations and conditions. Structural adjustment loans have been discontinued but the macroeconomic policy prescriptions continue under IMF lending programs and conditions for accessing debt relief. It should be noted that much of the criticism of the Washington Consensus was only partly about what the core policy prescription that were included (measures to ensure macroeconomic stability) but what they left out (human well-being, poverty, and inequality), the rigidity with which the policy prescriptions were applied (ignoring trade-offs involved such as cutting social expenditures), and the aid architecture (conditionality) with which they were implemented.

The post-2000 architecture of international development has changed in terms of instruments and narratives but not in content. The structural adjustment loans have been replaced by HIPC and IMF PRGF. The policy frameworks on which the funding was based is now the national government’s PRSPs with a focus on poverty and has replaced the Policy Framework Papers which required IMF and World Bank approval. These new instruments conform to the narrative of the partnership paradigm emphasizing national ownership, but they retain the same policy content that condition access to financing. Most importantly, the narrative of development and development aid has been reformulated around the moral imperative of eliminating dehumanizing poverty, an unacceptable condition for a world of immense financial and technological means.

### **Conclusions—Theory and Policy**

The new consensus on poverty may appear at first sight to reflect strong influence of HDCA; Hulme (2010) characterizes the creation of the MDGs as “Human Development meets Results-Based Management.” This may explain the conceptual birth of the MDGs but not their implementation. Policymakers in governments and development agencies have used these ideas to craft a new narrative of international development but not a new policy strategy. HDCA has not replaced the mainstream theoretical framework and remains a counter-current critical to the mainstream policy agenda.

In their historical study of ideas in the UN, Weiss, Jolly, and Emerij (2009) make a useful distinction between three types of ideas: positive—those that are descriptive and based on verifiable evidence; normative—those that define how



individuals and institutions should behave and what should be achieved; and causal—those that concern strategies and means to achieve a given end. The processes shaping dominant ideas and the influence of ideas on policy are not likely to be identical for these three types of ideas. This study shows the effective role that normative ideas played in challenging the legitimacy of the mainstream policy strategies. These elements of the HDC theories were instrumental in framing debates that gave rise to the poverty norm and the MDGs as an evaluative framework for development. But the causative ideas—about the role of empowerment and human agency, and the need for pro-poor growth—made little headway in the policy world. These causative ideas were not part of the standard economic analysis, nor did they challenge or replace standard policy prescriptions and analyses.

While theoretical work such as Sen's capability approach generates comprehensive development frameworks that integrate normative ideas about the purpose of development, some elements of the normative ideas have become dissociated from the rest of the framework. This is not unusual in the diffusion of economic theory which, Colander and Coats (1989) observe, is invariably selective. They point out for example that fiscal and monetary policy were not the central feature of Keynes's theoretical work but this is the element that was adopted by policymakers and come to be known as "Keynesian economics."

The selectivity in transmission from theory to practice is part of a process by which ideas become distorted as they become embraced by institutions (Boas and McNeil 2003). The MDGs whose emergence owed much to the human-centered perspectives on poverty and development have redefined poverty as meeting basic needs, leaving behind elements of participation, equality, and empowerment, which are essential to the human development and capabilities and other human-centered perspectives. The MDGs have been a particularly powerful tool of communication, because it uses the power of numbers to simplify complex concepts like poverty, make concrete intangible aspirations like dignity and freedom, and abstract locally embedded challenges into universal objectives. Without such a tool, the normative shift in international development would not have happened.

It is also plausible that the reason why the consensus on poverty and MDGs was easy to achieve politically with relatively little opposition (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2009), was that it is devoid of causative ideas. The central idea that the MDGs promote is normative—that poverty *should* be eradicated. They also contain a positive idea for they define poverty as a dehumanizing life and uses "hard evidence" for the purpose. The MDGs further reinforce this definition. The Declaration and the MDGs on the other hand contain no element of causal ideas about *how* poverty comes to exist and persist and how to end it. These causal ideas about the economic policy and strategies were precisely the most contentious elements of the acrimonious controversies of the 1980s and 1990s. They concern issues of trade policy, intellectual property, financial liberalization, and the balance of power in global governance which are of vital importance for the economic interests of countries. Although the economic interests of developed and developing countries are increasingly diverse, the developed countries are well served by neoliberal strategies and global governance arrangements, legitimated by standard economic analyses.

The central question in the International Relations literature on the role of ideas asks whether it is ideas *or* interests that shape state policy and action. This analysis has taken an empirical approach in examining the role of theoretical ideas in the recent evolution of development policy and used both factors to explain the evolution. Much of the theoretical research on human-centered, multidisciplinary approach to development has been motivated by values and ethical commitments to ideals of justice, equality, human dignity and freedom,

and equality. Academics working in these perspectives have been closely allied with civil society groups in international advocacy on development; feminist economics for example has developed in close interaction with advocacy on equal rights of women. But as Sen proclaimed, human development was an “idea ripe for the time” (McNeil 2007), i.e., the 1990s fraught with the controversies over structural adjustment and contestation over development paradigms. Human development gained prominence as a development perspective as it was instrumental to the policy positions of both civil society motivated by ethical ideals and of the economic and political interests of the governments of the South. These positions aligned with the interests of the governments of the Global South during the 1980s and 1990s when they were under attack from their own citizens for agreeing to the policy conditionalities of the World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment loans. But with the revisions made in the aid architecture built on the Paris Declaration principles of national ownership of policy reforms have changed those political dynamics. The heterodox human-centered perspectives are no longer of instrumental value to governments of the South for legitimating their positions to domestic and external audiences. The evolution of international development agendas has been a dynamic process in which such economic and political interests of states and ethical ideas both stimulated the generation of ideas and their diffusion.

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