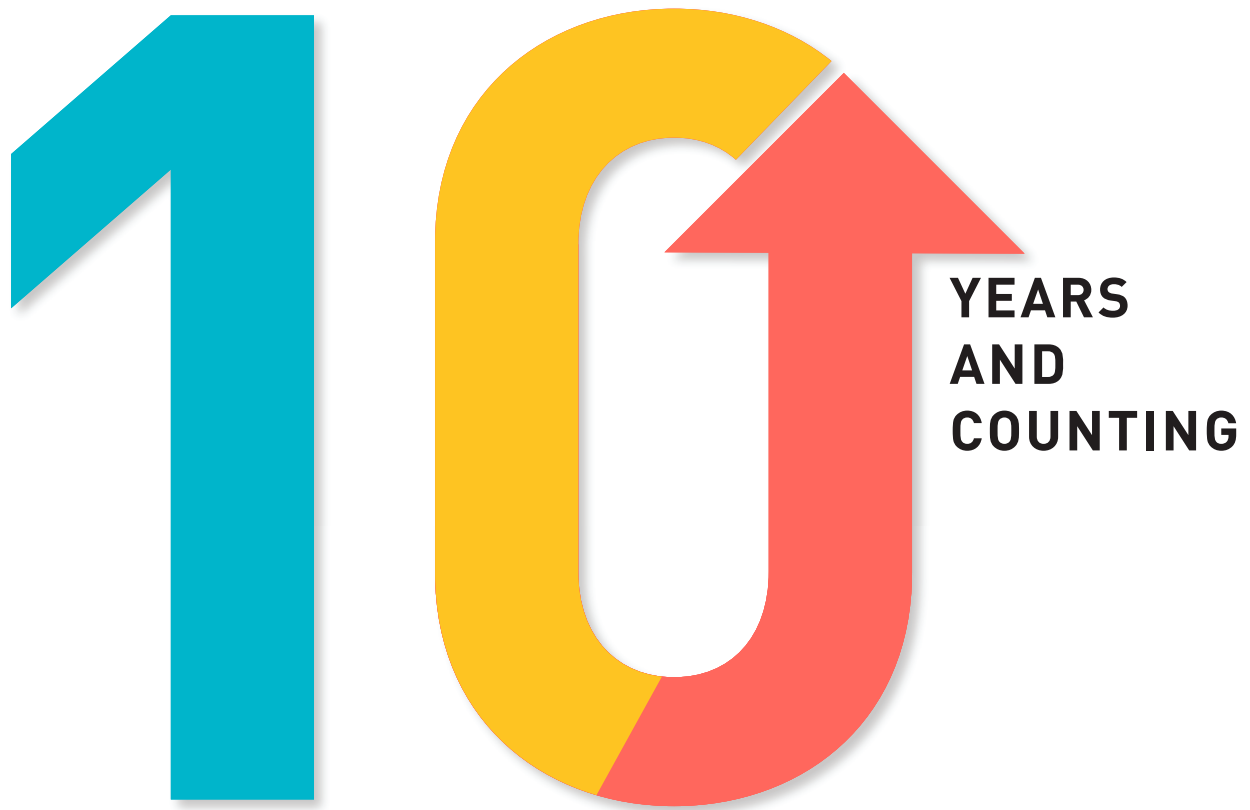


MEASURING AMERICA



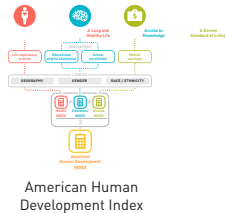
KRISTEN LEWIS
REBECCA GLUSKIN

10 YEARS OF MEASURING AMERICA

2008

MEASURE OF AMERICA IS BORN

HDI
5.04



The Measure of America

2009

SOUTHERN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT & FORECASTING



A Portrait of Mississippi



A Portrait of Louisiana



Common Good

2010

OPTIMISM & SECOND NATIONAL REPORT

HDI
5.03



29 Reasons for Optimism



The Measure of America 2010-2011



A Century Apart

2011

CALIFORNIA & INDEXING OPPORTUNITY



A Portrait of California



Opportunity Index

2012

DISCONNECTED YOUTH & WOMEN'S WELL-BEING



One in Seven



A Portrait of Marin County



Women's Well-Being: Ranking America's Top 25 Metro Areas

2013

THIRD NATIONAL REPORT & CAPTURING CONGRESS

HDI
5.06



State of Congress 2013



Halve the Gap by 2030



The Measure of America 2013-2014

10 YEARS OF MEASURING AMERICA

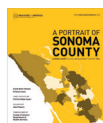
2014

CALIFORNIA SECOND EDITION &
SONOMA COUNTY

HDI
5.11



Connecting
Youth and
Strengthening



A Portrait of
Sonoma County



A Portrait of California
2014-2015

2015

GEOGRAPHIES OF OPPORTUNITY & DATA2GO.NYC



Impact of the US
Housing Crisis
on the Racial
Wealth Gap Across



Geographies
of Opportunity



Zeroing in on
Place and Race



DATA2GO.NYC



NYC Community
Health Profiles

2016

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION &
JOB OPPORTUNITIES

HDI
5.21



High School
Graduation in New
York City:
Is Neighborhood
Still Destiny?



Retail and
Opportunity

2017

A PORTRAIT OF LA COUNTY & PROMISING GAINS



Promising Gains,
Persistent Gaps



Who Graduates?



Highway to Health:
Life Expectancy
in Los Angeles
County



A Portrait of
Los Angeles
County



Youth Disconnection
in America



Cottage Data2Go

2018

A PORTRAIT OF NYC & TWO FUTURES



More than a Million
Reasons for Hope



A Portrait of New
York City



Two Futures



DATA2GOHEALTH.NYC



Measuring America:
10 Years and Counting

MOA ORIGIN STORY

Let's go back in time, back to long-ago 2007. Beyonce's "Irreplaceable" was the top song on the radio. George W. Bush was in the oval office. A shiny, captivating new gadget called the iPhone was all the rage. And outside of academia and other expert circles, there was little talk of rising inequality. The one percent was already peeling off from the rest of us, but Occupy Wall Street was still four years away, and we were blissfully unaware that the bottom was about to fall out of the economy in December.

This was the context in which a friend and former colleague from the United Nations, Sarah Burd-Sharps, approached me with an exciting prospect: to work with her to introduce to the United States an idea—human development—that had broadened the way we understand, measure, and track people's well-being around the world—from strictly economic metrics like GDP to a measure that captures some of the other things, besides money, that expand our choices, opportunities, and freedoms. She'd been working at the UN office that championed this new approach and thought it could make a valuable contribution to the US conversation on progress.



MOA Co-Founders Sarah Burd-Sharps (LEFT) and Kristen Lewis (RIGHT) in the early days of MOA.

We were motivated chiefly by four impulses. We wanted to:

- Explore inequality in a new way, one that included but went beyond money to bring in inequalities in health outcomes, access to quality education, voice and agency, life chances, and more.
- Bring good practices and new perspectives from other countries to bear on US problems, which we didn't see happening at all.
- Contribute to a more reasoned, well-informed debate about fundamental issues by making objective data and social science research more accessible and digestible. (Data-loving nerds that we were, we didn't fully understand that facts alone aren't sufficient to create change; more on that below.)
- Try to make a difference in our own country, after many years of working in an international development context.

So we established a 501c3 and were fortunate enough to receive a founding grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation—and we were off! We produced the first American Human Development Report in 2008.

We knew that to break into the crowded marketplace of ideas around social and economic progress and equity in the United States, we had to create something unique. A few ideas guided us. First, we hoped to reach people in the middle—people who cared about well-being and opportunity for all but were turned off by the partisan shouting match that was happening then and has grown deafening since. So we used neutral framing and language and did not associate our work with any political party. Second, we were keen to use design in a very deliberate way—not just to make our reports look pretty but also to facilitate understanding of complex issues—and we worked hard to find information designers who shared this vision. Those first designers, Elizabeth Pastor and Garry VanPatter of Humantific, are still our partners today. Finally, we wanted to connect the numbers to the actual people those numbers represented—to humanize the data. Design and storytelling were key strategies, and representing people's realities with care, respect, and dignity was a central principle.

What have we learned over the past ten years about what makes a project successful? A decade of experience has taught us doing the following is vital:

Engage meaningfully with partners on the ground from the very start. We could create online tools, conduct research, and write reports sitting alone in our offices. But tools created in a vacuum are seldom used, and reports that just sit on a shelf are worse than useless—they take resources that could be better spent improving people's



Kristen Lewis, Sarah Burd-Sharps, and Hilton Foundation Vice President Ed Cain discuss the American HDI with then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid shortly after the launch of the first Measure of America report in 2008.



Celebrating Humantific Co-founder Elizabeth Pastor's birthday while working on *A Portrait of New York City 2018*.

lives. Working closely with one or more well-respected, effective organizations in which a broad range of people have confidence is critical. Such organizations are vital in shaping reports and online tools by helping us identify key issues, understand the unique local context, access local data, understand which recommendations are most likely to gain traction and make a difference, and carry those recommendations forward after the project is complete. In our early years, we didn't fully understand the critical importance of strong collaborative relationships with local partners; this has been one of the greatest lessons from our work. For our recent *Portrait of Los Angeles County*, we not only received funding from a consortium of fifteen local foundations, but also rooted the work in a partnership with the Southern California Grantmakers and three LA County departments to ensure that the report would reflect the lived realities of Angelenos.

Create ways to bring in the voices of people with different types of expertise, and listen to what they say. Measure of America not only has a National Advisory Committee of leading thinkers and doers to guide us in all our work, but also constitutes advisory bodies of various sorts for each and every project we do. For *A Portrait of Los Angeles County*, for example, we benefited from the views of advisory committees that brought together more than 200 people, including scholars, policymakers, LA County staff, advocates, service providers, and community group representatives. We try to bring in people and groups with very different points of view: we don't shy away from conflict and debate, and we work to create spaces where contrasting perspectives can be expressed and heard respectfully. We honor different types of knowing and are grateful to those who share their ideas and lives with us. Our multi-stakeholder engagement methodology is one of our greatest strengths.

Help numbers tell their story. When we started Measure of America, we were naively optimistic about the power of data to change people's minds and motivate action. But numbers alone—even shocking ones—don't make change; people, organizations, and collective action do. So how can we move from data to action? Data need to be made accessible, put into context, embedded in an explanatory framework, and tied to the lives of real people through storytelling, infographics, maps, videos, and photographs. The capacity of organizations and individuals to use data to identify need, understand trends, track change over time, and hold elected officials accountable needs to be strengthened. And using data as a rallying point for collective action requires engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that they understand where the numbers come from, find them legitimate, and agree about what they tell us and why they matter. Helping numbers tell their story is now a big part of what we do at Measure of America.



Program Asistants Rupsha Basu (LEFT) and Marina Recio (RIGHT) interacting with "Mapping the Measure of America," MOA's installation at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

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35
19

HELP NUMBERS
TELL THEIR STORY.



LEAD WITH OUR
VALUES.

Lead with our values. The human development approach is not a value-free framework. On the contrary, it values above all human freedom and dignity and holds that a good life is a life of genuine choice. It is about people's ability to decide for themselves who to be and what to do and prioritizes, in the words of the UN Human Development Report office, "expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live." These values have motivated and sustained our team since its inception. We care about research and data because of their power to help those striving to make our communities better—fairer and freer, more equitable and inclusive. Being clear about our values as well as our skills helps us connect with partners whose vision of a better world we share.

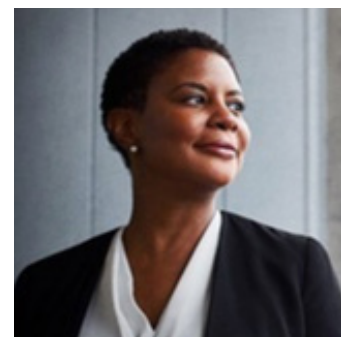
—MOA Director Kristen Lewis

MOA Today

Today, Measure of America is a project of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), a nearly century-old organization dedicated to mobilizing knowledge for the public good. Measure of America breathes life into numbers to stimulate fact-based dialogue and evidence-based policymaking to improve well-being and reduce disparities. We work with a wide range of partners to measure what matters for people's lives, presenting data and analysis in lively, accessible ways through human development reports, intuitive online data tools, infographics, and research briefs. We believe that everyone deserves the chance to live a freely chosen, flourishing life.

“Measuring America: 10 Years and Counting” mobilizes social science for the public good, which is the mission of the Council.”

-Alonda Nelson, SSRC president



SSRC President Alonda Nelson

In addition to creating human development reports, researching issues related to youth disconnection, and creating online tools under the MOA label, we also work together with our Council colleagues on a multitude of projects, from a multiyear learning partnership with the Atlantic Philanthropies to the SSRC's new Social Data Initiative. Alondra Nelson, a renowned scholar of science, technology, and social inequality and professor of sociology at Columbia University, leads the Council.

We are guided in our work by a trusted **National Advisory Committee** of leading thinkers and doers:

Paul Brest	Stanford Law School
Jeanne Brooks-Gunn	Columbia University's Teachers College
Edmund J. Cain	Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Prudence L. Carter	University of California, Berkeley
Flora M. Castillo	NJ TRANSIT Board of Directors
Dalton Conley	Princeton University
Nicholas Eberstadt	American Enterprise Institute
Gail Gershon	Gap Inc.
James Jackson	University of Michigan
Ellen Levy	Silicon Valley Connect
Mignon R. Moore	Barnard College
Evan Paul	GuideStar
Patrick Sharkey	New York University

Why the American Human Development Index?

In the dozen years since MOA first decided to adapt the UN's Human Development Index to an American context, other indexes and data dashboards have sprouted up everywhere. What sets the American Human Development Index apart?

It directly measures well-being in a way that is noncontroversial and easy to understand. The wide variation in American HD Index scores makes plain the fundamental disparities between different regions, states, metro areas, and communities; between different racial and ethnic groups; and between women and men. And it does so using indicators that most people can agree are central to a good life and which are easy to measure—health, education, and earnings. In America, an Asian baby girl born today can expect to live nearly 18 years longer than a black baby boy born today. In Los Angeles County, 72 percent of adults in the Westwood neighborhood have a bachelor's degree, some twenty-three times the rate in East Rancho Dominguez. In the New York metro area, median earnings for Indian men are



Current MOA team at the DATA2GOHEALTH.NYC launch.

The wide variation in American HD Index scores makes plain the fundamental disparities between different regions, states, metro areas, and communities; between different racial and ethnic groups; and between women and men.

three and a half times those of Bangladeshi women. These objective, hard numbers are not only easy to grasp; what they mean for people's lives is also easy to understand.

Some indexes include indicators that not everyone agrees are important, limiting their utility as rallying points for broad-based collective action. Others include subjective indicators open to interpretation and disagreement. And still others put fundamental and derivative issues on the same plane and thus measure the same thing more than once; for example, an index that measures a family's earnings as well as whether or not that family can afford housing is, in essence, counting earnings twice and giving that issue more weight in the final calculation.

It is comparable over time and from place to place. Because the data used to build the HD Index are regularly and reliably collected year after year across the entire country, we are able to calculate scores down to the level of census tract and racial and ethnic group in the same way every year. This allows us to track change over time using consistent metrics in a single place (e.g., Minnesota in 2005 compared to Minnesota in 2016), to compare well-being levels in different locales (e.g., Missouri vs. Montana), and to gauge the well-being of specific groups living in different places (Latinos in Los Angeles compared to Latinos in Chicago, for instance).

It focuses on outcomes. While many data points help us understand specific problems related to people's lives (like unemployment rates) or quantify efforts to address these problems (for example, funding for job training or minimum-wage policies), we often stop short of measuring the impact of these efforts: Are programs and investments making a difference? Is economic security improving as a result? Are people's living standards rising? The American Human Development Index focuses on the end result of efforts to bring about change.

It counts everyone. The American Human Development Index moves away from the binary us-them view of advantage and disadvantage of today's poverty measure to one in which everyone can see him- or herself along the same continuum. This more inclusive analysis, based on objective data, can stimulate a less polarized, partisan conversation and build common cause among groups that share the same struggles.

It is a road-tested methodology that rests on a rigorous conceptual framework. The American Human Development Index is a proven product; Measure of America has been calculating it for over a decade, using it to produce scores of tools, created in partnership with dozens of organizations, that are used by tens of thousands of people across the country. The American HD Index builds on the United Nations' Human Development Index, the global gold standard for assessing progress and gauging well-being for nearly thirty years. The American index, like the global index, rests on a robust conceptual framework, the capabilities approach of Nobel laureate in economics Amartya Sen, and was the brainchild of some of the world's most gifted economists. Though many alternatives have appeared on the scene in recent years, none offers the conceptual clarity, theoretical rigor, advocacy power, or wide applicability of the Human Development Index.

The HD Index is a shorthand for overall human development achievements and deficits in well-being that limit the horizons of specific populations. The index shines a spotlight on who in our society has the chance to live a freely chosen, rewarding life and who doesn't.



MOA Impact Stories

DATA2GO.NYC Strengthening Civic Engagement

“People come into my office and ask... ‘Have you found anything for this number?’ or, ‘Have you heard anything for this metric?’ and I’m like, I haven’t, but let’s check DATA2GO.NYC.”

– Veronica Cuellar, Data Manager, South Bronx Rising Together

South Bronx Rising Together, a community-wide effort that brings together a network of neighborhood residents and program providers to build pathways of success for children and youth “from cradle through college and career,” is creating a common agenda to inform community-led change in Bronx Community District 3. DATA2GO.NYC has proved to be an invaluable tool for this collective-impact project, and Measure of America helped South Bronx Rising Together develop shared metrics.

Veronica Cuellar, data manager at South Bronx Rising Together, uses the DATA2GO.NYC map on the fly when working with community members in meetings and in her office. She says, “I don’t like when people ask a question and we don’t have an answer... DATA2GO is definitely one of those tabs that I don’t close on my phone. It’s always open. So I appreciate the user-friendliness of it.” One of Cuellar’s goals is to increase data literacy among the residents and communities she works with, and DATA2GO.NYC helps people find the answers they are looking for themselves. Furthermore, Cuellar argues, when you invite community residents to be part of the analysis and decision-making, they become more effective in contributing to community change and can continue the work even after you are gone.

DATA2GO.NYC deepens engagement and empowers community members to understand the areas in which they live, work, and play. For data experts and novices alike, DATA2GO.NYC is a tool that provides open access to New York City population and community-level data in an easy-to-use, accessible, and all-inclusive format. DATA2GO.NYC enables users to pinpoint particular groups and areas in need, craft solutions, target policies and services, track progress, and advocate for change.

“People come into my office and ask... ‘Have you found anything for this number?’ or, ‘Have you heard anything for this metric?’ and I’m like, I haven’t, but let’s check DATA2GO.NYC.”

*– Veronica Cuellar,
Data Manager,
South Bronx Rising
Together*

Unleashing the Power of Data

“Measure of America’s data helps us create our own poverty reports and discuss how low-income families are actually doing, accounting for measures that the federal poverty line ignores.”

– Henry Gascon, *United Ways of California*

United Ways of California (UWC) is committed to using Measure of America’s American Human Development Index to advance opportunities in health, education, and financial stability for every person in every community. Henry Gascon, director of program and policy development at UWC, says that using Measure of America’s data and reports helps UWC understand “how low-income families are actually doing, accounting for measures that the federal poverty line ignores.” United Way branches across the state have launched initiatives that target issues highlighted in Measure of America’s two *Portrait of California* reports (2011 and 2014). For UWC, a more comprehensive understanding allows for a more comprehensive approach.

“[MOA’s] data helps us create our own poverty reports and discuss how low-income families are actually doing, accounting for measures that the federal poverty line ignores.”

– Henry Gascon,
United Ways of California

Harnessing Data for Community Change

“As director of planning and land use, I deal with demographics and datasets all the time, and this is the first time that we’ve really had an a la carte source for so many different types of datasets... I think [DATA2GO.NYC] is the best source that we have for this work.”

– Diana Switaj, *Director of Planning and Land Use, Community Board 1*

In 2017, Manhattan’s Community Board 1 embarked on creating a Livability Index for their district. Their Department of Planning and Land Use set out to identify the many factors that affect the quality of life for Community Board 1 residents, and how these factors compare across New York City neighborhoods.

Community Board 1 compiled a tremendous report of over 120 features, such as physician availability, school safety, prevalence of grocery stores, and internet access. In order to develop such an impressive index, DATA2GO.NYC proved to be indispensable. As Diana Switaj, director of planning and land use, says, “It’s so easy to find, and it’s so user friendly. It’s a really great source for a snapshot for whatever data point you’re looking for; I think it’s great.” In the *Livability Study* alone, Measure of America’s data was used thirty-one times.

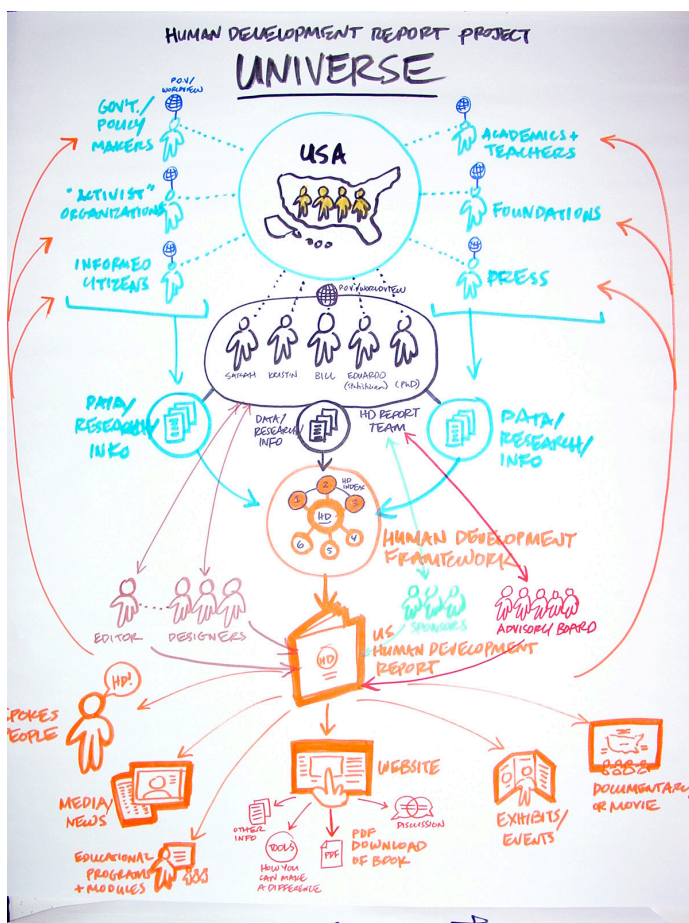
With this comprehensive report in hand, members of Community Board 1 were able to get a sense of overall livability for the district, the areas that could use improvement, and how these can translate into actionable changes. Switaj says that DATA2GO.NYC numbers add weight to anecdotal evidence on matters such as air quality and noise pollution: “It just provided so much data for that and it’s just so easy to use.”

Community Board 1 will likely return to DATA2GO.NYC for future livability studies. As Switaj said, “The idea is that we would have a methodology set up so it could periodically be updated...if we set a benchmark, then that’s something that we could comparatively analyze every five years... tracking it over time is really useful.”

Importance of Design

Data visualization can range from uninformative to powerful. Measure of America wanted to take a deliberate and thoughtful approach. The data of health, education, and income represents actual people's lives, so we then spend a lot of time thinking about those values and what they mean in relation to one another, how they have changed over time and across geographies, other events that might impact the data over time, and where the interesting stories are inside those numbers—stories that tell us something about the people that make up those rates and trends. For MOA, it's not just about portraying the rate of unemployment or the percentage of students graduating high school on time; it's about showing how real humans can expand their opportunities and how that growth can be tracked over time. How we talk about populations and how those data are displayed visually make all the difference.

Measure of America has always valued investing in the design of our data. We want it to be understood easily and to reflect the humanity underlying the numbers. Most of our print materials and brand identity were created by Humantific, an internationally recognized SenseMaking for ChangeMaking firm based in New York and Madrid. Humantific values and embodies this same thoughtful approach, and they have designed our print reports, infographics, and visualizations. Similarly, we wanted to ensure our data tools and web-based visualizations were intentional and functional, so for our digital suite of DATA2GO tools, we have partnered with LA-based artist and designer Rosten Woo. His work is focused on projects that help people understand complex systems, reorient themselves to places, and participate in group decision-making. We are proud to work with such creative partners who value human development and access to opportunity as much as we do.



Looking Ahead to Measure of America's Next Ten Years

Although Measure of America has been consistent in the way in which we have calculated and deployed the American Human Development Index, the last decade has seen many innovations. Thanks to greater data availability, we are increasingly able to calculate index values for Asian and Latino subgroups and for US- and foreign-born residents. We have opened up an important line of research and advocacy around youth disconnection, and our annual calculations of the youth disconnection rate for different groups and geographies are an important source of information for the field. Our work with organizations on the ground is much broader and deeper today than it was when we began; our approach to stakeholder engagement, community involvement, and co-creation is now among our greatest strengths. Our online presence has vastly expanded, from a simple map to display HD Index scores for states in 2008 to a suite of online tools that includes an updated national map and locally focused tools like DATA2GO.NYC, DATA2GOHEALTH.NYC, and Cottage Data2Go. Our visual language has continued to evolve and our infographics have gotten better.

In the coming decade, we will continue to build on these innovations, and the human development and capabilities approach along with the HD Index will continue to be central to our work exploring inequalities and advocating for people-centered policies to address them. At the same time, we feel compelled to respond to issues that have presented themselves in recent years with a new urgency, namely climate change, societal divisions, and the potential of new technologies to increase inequality. We believe that these issues are ripe for exploration through a human development lens. Thus we anticipate engaging more deliberately with questions of:

Sustainability. Our work here will take two forms. One is supporting cities, counties, and states in setting local goals and tracking progress against the United Nations' Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of seventeen goals and 169 targets to be achieved in all countries by 2030. The SDGs offer a way to understand and address critical barriers to well-being, economic growth and prosperity, and



environmental sustainability in the United States and to put American challenges and opportunities within a global context. The United States played a leading role in negotiating these goals; as a result, they reflect American values and priorities. The spirit behind the SDGs is not just to meet the goals as measured by global or national averages, but rather to spur meaningful action in states and cities, counties and communities. The true aim is meeting the goals everywhere and for everyone. Doing so in the United States will require adapting the global goals in terms of relevant geographic units of analysis (states, metro areas, or counties), population groups (major racial and ethnic groups, women and men, foreign- and US-born residents), and indicators. Measure of America's website features a global goals dashboard for states and counties to help with this endeavor, and we are eager to partner with localities to create sustainable development targets and plans for reaching them.



The second is to build into our work a more systematic analysis of how climate change will affect the well-being as well as choices and opportunities of different groups of Americans. Human development is about expanding people's capabilities, but it is also about creating human security by protecting the capabilities people already have and building resiliency. Our experience of natural disasters in the US since 2005—from Hurricane Katrina to Superstorm Sandy to the Thomas, Mendocino Complex, Camp, Carr, and Woolsey wildfires that have ravaged California in recent months—is that the people with the fewest capabilities suffer the most from disasters and recover the slowest. Thus the increased frequency and severity of extreme events, from storms to fires to floods, will have serious human development implications for communities across the country, particularly for the most vulnerable within them.



Social and economic inclusion. Income inequality measures the extent to which income is distributed in an uneven manner among the population. In the United States, income inequality has been growing for over thirty years. The Great Recession deepened the longstanding racial and ethnic wealth divide. The typical white family held a net worth six times greater than the typical black family at the end of the twentieth century. That gap has now doubled to a twelvefold difference. The wealth gap between white and Hispanic households has widened as well. As inequality grows, the rungs on the ladder of social mobility grow further apart, making it more difficult for poor Americans, who are disproportionately people of color, to make the climb to the middle class; in addition, as

middle-class Americans' grip on economic security grows more tenuous, they may find themselves slipping down, further slowing the progress of those on the bottom. Many Americans are now shut out—excluded—from the economic bounty and security enjoyed by upper-income families. We will explore this issue in greater depth in future projects.

We also hope to place greater focus on social exclusion. Social exclusion “involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.” How can we build inclusion both among groups that have long been excluded, such as people of color, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, and LGBTQ people, among others, and people who now voice feelings of exclusion, such as older white people living in rural areas and white men who used to work in manufacturing or mining jobs that have all but evaporated? Feeling a part of society is important to well-being, and evidence is thick on the ground that large segments of society feel alienated: What does that mean for human development?



Technology and inequality. At the turn of the millennium, the digital age promised the democratization of knowledge and the possibility to reduce or completely do away with human error in decisions. But as our world becomes digitized and algorithms are increasingly the “neutral” agents in decision-making, social scientists warn not only of the limits of technology but also of its potential for justifying, perpetuating, and compounding long-standing inequalities. Mathematician Cathy O’Neil dubs the opaque, biased mathematical models that reinforce discrimination “weapons of math destruction.” Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy warn of a new “economy of moral judgement” where outcomes are determined by data on “prior good actions and good tastes” and painted as morally deserved. The potential of technology to improve human lives as well as entrench inequality in new ways will be a larger part of our exploration of inequality in the coming years.



Endnotes

¹ Inequality.org. "[Facts: Wealth Inequality in the United States.](#)"

² Mack, "[Social Exclusion.](#)"

³ O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy.*

⁴ Fourcade and Healy, "Seeing Like a Market."

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