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**THE MEASURE OF AMERICA APPROACH TO  
GAUGING WELL-BEING AND OPPORTUNITY  
IN THE UNITED STATES: CONCEPT,  
APPLICATION, AND IMPACTS AT THE  
COMMUNITY LEVEL**

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MEASURE OF AMERICA

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## **ABOUT THE PROJECT**

*Measure of America (MOA) is a nonpartisan project of the Social Science Research Council. It creates easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being and opportunity in America and stimulates fact-based dialogue about issues of health, education, and income. Through print and online reports, interactive maps, and custom-built dashboards, MOA works closely with partners to breathe life into numbers, using data to identify areas of need, pinpoint levers for change, and track progress over time.*

## **ABOUT THE PAPER**

*Since 2008, Measure of America has released more than a dozen reports measuring well-being and opportunity from the national down to the community level across the United States. These reports have found a broad audience of researchers, philanthropists, advocates, the media, and policymakers at all levels of government. This working paper considers what kinds of impacts this research might be having through case studies of two counties—Sonoma in California and Maricopa in Arizona—where MOA work has gained traction and holds the potential to influence public policy. Questions such as when and how local-level data on well-being can be used to drive change are discussed in light of findings from the two cases.*

# THE MEASURE OF AMERICA APPROACH TO GAUGING WELL-BEING AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES: CONCEPT, APPLICATION, AND IMPACTS AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

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Measure of America (MOA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research group that measures the distribution of well-being and opportunity in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the Human Development Report series produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and by the human development and capabilities approaches that inform and guide its work, MOA has produced numerous detailed studies of disparities in well-being at the national, state, and local levels.

The following is an overview of the human development concept and how MOA has applied it in its research, particularly at the local level.<sup>2</sup> Also explored is the impact that local indicators of well-being from MOA's research are beginning to have in two specific communities where its work has found an audience and gained traction and is now poised to influence public policy. The first example is Sonoma County, one of two California counties for which MOA has produced human development "portraits." The second is Maricopa County, the most populous in Arizona, where MOA work on youth well-being has struck a chord with local policymakers and stimulated community leaders to move to reconnect disconnected young people to education and employment opportunities. These case studies are presented with three questions in mind:

- Can human development indicators be effectively measured at the local level?
- When and how can these data be used by citizens and local leaders to drive change in their communities?
- Under what conditions can this process culminate in policy change and innovation?

The paper concludes with some preliminary lessons learned from these cases about how and when local indicator research on well-being can be used to help steer policy in a direction conducive to expanding human capabilities and giving people more choices in what they can do and what they can become (Nussbaum 2011).

## **MEASURE OF AMERICA AND THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND CAPABILITIES APPROACHES**

More than two decades ago, UNDP released its first global Human Development Report. This work introduced the world to a new way of thinking about development and put forward a new measure meant to help policymakers move past their overreliance on economic measures, such as gross domestic product (GDP), as proxies for human well-being. This Human Development Index, created in 1990 by human development theorist Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq, has since become an influential and globally recognized metric, with some seven hundred national and subnational human development reports published in 135 countries, in addition to the annual global Human Development Report series (UNDP 2014).

In 2006, MOA was founded to bring the human development way of thinking to the United States. With *The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008–2009* (Burd-Sharps, Lewis, and Martins 2008), the organization became the first to publish a human development report for a high-income country. Featuring a foreword by Nobel laureate Sen, this first Measure of America volume introduced the human development and capabilities approaches to American audiences beyond university walls and outside international development circles. It also presented a modified American Human Development (HD) Index for the fifty states and all 435 congressional districts. Since the launch of its first report, MOA has produced two more national volumes and has partnered with philanthropic organizations and the public sector to create human development “portraits” of Louisiana, Mississippi, and California, including local

reports for two counties in California. The group has also produced thematic research briefs on economic opportunity and mobility, women's well-being, and "disconnection" among young people from education and employment.

The human development and capabilities approaches provide the theoretical roots for Measure of America's work:

Human development is formally defined as the process of improving people's well-being and expanding their freedoms and opportunities—in other words, it is about what people can do and be. The human development approach puts people at the center of analysis and looks at the range of interlocking factors that shape their opportunities and enable them to live lives of value and choice. People with high levels of human development can invest in themselves and their families and live to their full potential; those without find many doors shut and many choices and opportunities out of reach. (Burd-Sharps and Lewis 2014, 14)

The main proxy indicator for human development used in MOA research is the American HD Index. The Index uses life expectancy at birth as a proxy for the capability to live a long and healthy life; educational attainment among adults ages twenty-five and older and educational enrollment among three- to twenty-four-year-olds to measure access to knowledge; and median personal earnings for all workers ages sixteen and older to measure material standards of living. Indicators are normalized based on a standard methodology, and then the health, education, and living standards proxies are averaged together to calculate the overall HD Index.<sup>3</sup> Differentiating it from the global Human Development Index, which is set on a scale of 0 to 1, the American Index ranges from 0 to 10, where 10 reflects the best possible outcomes in all three dimensions of well-being and 0 the worst.

Measuring human development with the American HD Index has several benefits. First, it provides a meaningful alternative to the financially focused metrics too often used as proxies for human well-being. As years of UNDP and MOA research can attest, growth in GDP does not necessarily translate into increasing human well-being; it is useful for understanding how the economy is doing but far less so for understanding how people are doing. The HD Index also shows how well-being is a multidimensional phenomenon and encourages the formulation of responses to well-being challenges

that cut across disciplinary and programmatic silos. Finally, the HD Index helps communities see themselves on a continuum of well-being, breaking traditional “us versus them” dichotomies comparing the poor to the non-poor or the advantaged to the disadvantaged (Burd-Sharps and Lewis 2014).

One drawback of the Human Development Index and its national offshoots is that they capture only a small part of the wider human development framework (Fukuda-Parr 2003). Vital elements of human capabilities, in particular participation in decisionmaking and the exercise of political freedoms, are not captured in these composite indexes. For this reason, to the extent data availability allows, MOA reports always include a suite of other indicators of civic participation and personal and community security, and other aspects of health, education, and material well-being not in the HD Index.

### **CASE STUDY: A PORTRAIT OF SONOMA COUNTY AND LOCAL HEALTH GOALS**

Sonoma County is located in Northern California, on the shores of San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. Home to about half a million residents, the county contains modestly sized urban centers, such as Santa Rosa and Petaluma, as well as a beautiful coastline and countryside where some of California’s most productive agricultural fields and best-known vineyards are found. Sonoma County scores 5.42 out of a possible 10 on the American HD Index, higher than the California state score of 5.39. Its residents enjoy lifespans that are longer and levels of secondary school completion that are higher than the respective national averages. Wide disparities hide behind this aggregate performance, however. A considerable margin separates the high HD Index scores of white and Asian American residents of Sonoma from those of their African American and Latino neighbors. For example, Asian American life expectancy at birth in Sonoma is 86.2 years, more than eight years longer than it is for African Americans in the county. Fewer than 5 percent of white Sonoma adults never completed high school, compared with nearly 44 percent of Latinos in the county. Spatially, the top-ranked neighborhood of East Bennett Valley, which scores 8.47 on the Index, is only five miles (eight kilometers) east of bottom-ranked Roseland Creek, which scores only 2.79 (Burd-Sharps and Lewis 2014).

These findings are taken from *A Portrait of Sonoma County*, an MOA publication commissioned by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services (DHS), the county public health authority, and released in May

2014. DHS commissioned the report to help it work toward the ambitious goal of making Sonoma County the healthiest in California by 2020. The report mapped disparities in human development outcomes by gender and by race and ethnicity across the county, as well as for each of its ninety-nine census tracts.<sup>4</sup>

Besides this fine-grained spatial analysis of disparities in well-being, the *Portrait* included two unique features. One was its “Pledge of Support”—a statement of commitment local leaders were invited to sign, dedicating themselves to using the *Portrait* and its findings to support the county’s goal of becoming the healthiest in the state. As of December 2014, the pledge had been signed by representatives of more than fifty-five organizations in Sonoma County, including service providers, media outlets, businesses, nonprofit groups, and government agencies. Public officials, including the mayors of Petaluma and Sebastopol, local superintendents of schools, and members of city councils, also signed the pledge.

The report concluded with its second unique feature, the “Agenda for Action,” a set of broad policy recommendations DHS and its allies could implement to improve well-being for the residents of Sonoma and help the county advance toward its health goal. The agenda included a variety of population- and place-based recommendations, among them the institution of universal, high-quality preschool for young children, the reduction of tobacco use among teens and adults, and the encouragement of cross-sectoral approaches to improving well-being in those communities that scored lowest on the American HD Index (Burd-Sharps and Lewis 2014).

In the six months after the release of the *Portrait of Sonoma County*, DHS and its allies rolled out an extensive awareness-building campaign to communicate the report’s findings to audiences across the county and across sectors. As of December 2014, DHS staff had made ninety public presentations of the *Portrait* and its data, addressing other local government entities, community groups, business leaders, and the general public. Influential groups in the county, such as the Latino Health Forum, Los Cien Sonoma County Latino Leaders, and superintendents of Sonoma County public schools, had all used or referenced data from the *Portrait* in events of their own (Dadko, personal interview, December 4, 2014). Copies of the report are widely available, including in Spanish translation, and data from it may be downloaded free of charge from the MOA website. The next step in the rollout was to move from awareness building to encouraging local ownership of the data.

The final step would be using the *Portrait* and its data for strategic planning and taking action to reduce health disparities and improve well-being in communities across the county.

There is some evidence that the *Portrait* is already being put to use to change public policy and organizational programs. Shortly after its release, the board of supervisors, which is the executive branch of the county government, imposed new limits on the use of electronic cigarettes across Sonoma County (*Sonoma Valley Sun* 2014). Although the board did not directly reference the *Portrait* in its decision, this new policy was in line with an Agenda for Action recommendation to intensify efforts to reduce tobacco use, based on findings about high use among teens and adults in some communities. Municipal governments in Sonoma County followed suit with new tobacco regulations of their own. In October 2014, the community of Healdsburg became the first city in California to raise the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products legally from eighteen to twenty-one (Mason 2014). Another item in the Agenda for Action—making high-quality preschool available across the county—moved closer to realization at a board of supervisors’ meeting on December 2, 2014. Supervisors accepted a report that presented a detailed model and a set of cost estimates for providing universal preschool countywide, indicating their support for moving this plan toward implementation (Sonoma County Board of Supervisors 2014). An MOA analysis of download requests from its website also suggests a variety of local organizations are using data from the *Portrait* for grant applications and strategic planning purposes.

Findings from the report are also being used in novel ways by organizations outside the coalition that guided its creation and have supported its use. Advocates of instituting a county “living wage” of \$15 per hour have cited figures from the *Portrait* on the very low median earnings in some Sonoma communities as evidence that a higher minimum wage is needed (Martin 2014). A local nonprofit group is organizing an “urban hike” through the Sonoma census tracts that rank highest and lowest on the HD Index, both of which are located near the city of Santa Rosa. The group will invite residents from these two communities to explore their respective neighborhoods together, with the goal of fostering connections between them and stimulating discussion about the assets and challenges of both. Los Cien Sonoma, a community group mentioned above, has committed itself to acting on the report’s findings, in part by working to engage and educate Latino voters in Sonoma, foster the development of future leaders from within the

Latino community, and advocate for the establishment of a cultural center in Southwest Santa Rosa, where the lowest ranking census tracts in the county are clustered. Such initiatives are intended to “humanize” the data presented in the *Portrait* and help build bridges between communities that are physically close but vastly different in their human development profiles (Dadko, personal interview, December 4, 2014).

## **CASE STUDY: MARICOPA COUNTY, ARIZONA, AND THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH DISCONNECTION**

Several MOA reports have featured a youth-focused human development indicator not represented in the HD Index: the percentage of young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four who are not enrolled in school and not working. This indicator touches on a number of the interconnected freedoms originally identified by Amartya Sen as central to the capabilities approach, among them the economic and social opportunities potentially lost to disconnection (Sen 1999). “Disconnected youth” enter adulthood at a serious disadvantage to their “connected” peers:

A connection to an educational institution or employer gives a young person at least a foothold—and at best a firm foundation—for the climb toward independent, self-sufficient adulthood. Through education and early work experiences, young people acquire formal credentials as well as the informal prerequisites for professional success—soft skills like punctuality and collaboration, exposure to the unspoken rules and behavioral norms of the workplace, and networks of contacts and connections. Interactions with peers, teachers, and mentors in class and on the job help young people develop critical social and emotional capabilities, such as knowing how to form and maintain healthy relationships, understanding one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and learning to regulate one’s feelings and impulses. Equally important, school and work provide a sense of belonging and the feelings of worth and dignity that come with having a purpose in life. Successful firsts in school and work foster self-confidence, optimism, and agency. (Lewis and Burd-Sharps 2013a, 5)

MOA engagement with the issue of youth disconnection began in 2012, with the publication of *One in Seven: Ranking Youth Disconnection in the 25 Largest*

*Metro Areas*, and continued with the publication the following year of *Halve the Gap by 2030: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities*. Both reports were undertaken on MOA's own initiative, made possible by the support of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. They found that between five and six million American young people had been disconnected from school and work in recent years and provided detailed analysis of variations in youth disconnection among America's largest cities and among the neighborhoods within them.

Phoenix is the capital of Arizona and the seat of Maricopa County, the most populous of the state's fifteen counties. The Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes all of Maricopa County as well as neighboring Pinal County, is home to 4.4 million residents, making it the twelfth largest metropolitan area in the nation (US Census Bureau 2014). The Phoenix metro area has an HD Index score of 5.20, compared to 5.03 for the United States as a whole. Residents' life expectancy at birth is 1.3 years longer than that of US residents overall, but their attainment of higher education and, especially, the net enrollment rate of their school-age population lag behind the national averages. Only 74 percent of children and young people ages three to twenty-four are enrolled in school in the Phoenix metro area, compared to nearly 78 percent nationwide and over 81 percent in the top-ranked Boston metro area (Lewis and Burd-Sharps 2013b).

Low rates of enrollment both contribute to and are symptomatic of the high rate of youth disconnection in the Phoenix metro area. The *One in Seven* report found 18.8 percent of young people not working and not in school, the worst performance of any of the twenty-five largest metro areas in the nation. In addition to low school enrollment, high rates of childbirth among teen girls and young women and considerable disparities in youth disconnection by race and ethnicity were found to be drivers of poor well-being outcomes among young people (Burd-Sharps and Lewis 2012). The follow-up report, *Halve the Gap*, showed the Phoenix metro area continuing to lag behind other American urban centers on youth disconnection. It found over 93,000 youth not working and not in school. *Halve the Gap* also provided new insights into the gender and spatial dimensions of youth disconnection in the Phoenix area. Breaking from the national trend, the rate of youth disconnection among young women was found to be higher than that among young men. In addition, analysis of new neighborhood-level estimates revealed only one in every seventeen young people was disconnected in affluent Phoenix suburbs, such as Paradise Valley and Fountain Hills,

whereas almost one out of every three was disconnected in South Phoenix (Lewis and Burd-Sharps 2013a).

The poor performance of the Phoenix metro area in terms of youth well-being was brought to the forefront by a front-page article that appeared in the *Arizona Republic*, the state's largest newspaper, in August 2013. Citing findings from *One in Seven* about the last-place ranking of Phoenix among America's twenty-five largest metro areas on youth disconnection, the article caught the attention of local youth advocates and policymakers and served as a catalyst for community leaders to come together to study the problem more closely and come up with a coordinated response. The Maricopa County Education Service Agency (MCESA), the local education service agency in the Greater Phoenix area, took the lead by organizing a series of "Disconnected Youth Summits" for policymakers and local leaders, citing figures from the *One in Seven* report as a major motivation for these efforts. Two summits, held in May and October of 2014, brought together leaders in education, philanthropy, and local government (including Greg Stanton, mayor of the City of Phoenix) from across Arizona and nationwide to discuss the extent of the youth disconnection challenge in Phoenix and coordinate responses. The first summit, which featured MOA codirector Kristen Lewis as a presenter, aimed to spread awareness of the challenge in Maricopa County. The second, which attracted a crowd of nearly 250, focused on strategies for addressing it with discussions of best-practice cases from around the county. Following the summits, two working groups were convened, in November and December 2014, to plan concrete actions for "reengaging disconnected youth" (MCESA 2014).

Although this work is ongoing, many plans are already in place, and some resources have already been mobilized to help address the challenge of youth disconnection in the Phoenix area. In late 2013, the US Department of Justice awarded a \$1.5 million grant to MCESA, in partnership with state and county juvenile corrections and human services authorities, to provide services to currently and formerly incarcerated juveniles to help prevent them from becoming disconnected youth or reentering the criminal justice system (MCESA 2013). Mayor Stanton has pledged to open "reengagement centers" across Phoenix where young people can get access to information about education and employment opportunities (McClay 2014). Maricopa County superintendent of schools Don Covey, another high-ranking local elected official who has championed the issue, sees the establishment of these centers as one of four "pathways" to bringing down the number and

percentage of disconnected youth in the Phoenix area. According to Covey, the other pathways are building “educational momentum” for greater high school completion; creating career opportunities for young people; and fostering a positive environment for youth development to help young people steer clear of substance abuse and criminal activity—wrong turns in the life course that can lead to disconnection from school and work, among other negative consequences (Brodie 2014).

Responses to the challenge of youth disconnection in the Phoenix area are starting to come from the private sector as well as from local government. Global coffee retailer Starbucks has chosen Phoenix for inclusion in its Solutions City initiative, sponsoring meetings between Mayor Stanton, community leaders, and residents at one of its outlets in the city to discuss ways to bring down the percentage of youth disconnection (Kunthara 2014); and, in December 2014, Rising Youth Theater, a performing arts group, staged the premier of a dramatic production called “Disengaged” at the Phoenix Center for the Arts. Written by local playwright Milta Ortiz, its cast comprises local youth whose performance is inspired by youth perspectives on the experience of disconnection (Brodie 2014).

What was it about the youth disconnection research that caught the attention of so many policymakers in the Phoenix area? After all, Arizona had long struggled with a high dropout rate from public high schools (Stetser and Stillwell 2014), and youth unemployment was a major challenge in the state even before the Great Recession struck in 2007 (Young Invincibles 2013). According to Maricopa County deputy chief superintendent Kristine Morris, the local-level data about youth disconnection contained in the MOA reports revealed to policymakers the existence of a poorly served population they had a responsibility and obligation to help—the data made the invisible visible. Furthermore, local leaders saw the development of a highly skilled workforce in the Phoenix area—hit especially hard by the recession—as a vital step toward attracting business and investment to reinvigorate the local economy. The many disconnected youth in Phoenix had the potential to become productive members of this workforce, and local leaders were eager to help reconnect them to training and work (Morris, personal interview, December 5, 2014).

## DISCUSSION

Measure of America's work in Sonoma and Maricopa provides two cases in which local indicators of well-being are helping to prompt and inform coordinated responses to challenges facing communities. A striking difference between them is that while *A Portrait of Sonoma* was commissioned explicitly by policymakers to support existing initiatives, the *One in Seven* and *Halve the Gap* reports were produced independent of any existing policy process. Local leaders in Sonoma County wanted the *Portrait* to help inform and advance their own policy agenda to make Sonoma the healthiest county in California. Through careful planning and organizing on the part of Sonoma DHS, the report was prepared with the input and participation of numerous local leaders and released with numerous signatures to the "Pledge of Support." The result of this participatory process was significant buy-in and ownership of the report and its findings from a broad cross section of leaders in the public and private sectors across Sonoma.

In Maricopa, on the other hand, MOA research on youth disconnection caught the attention of policymakers who were already working to address the related challenges of a high dropout rate and high youth unemployment. Whether motivated by a sense of community responsibility or simply by their interpretations of the mandates of their offices, high-profile elected officials such as Mayor Stanton and Superintendent Covey were quick to take on the Phoenix area's youth disconnection challenge and to begin to organize a response. Pragmatic considerations may also have played a role. Local leaders recognized that the more than ninety thousand disconnected youth in the Phoenix metro area could contribute to reinvigorating a local economy still reeling from the economic crisis if they could be properly "reconnected" to education and employment.

In both Sonoma and Maricopa, responses to the disparities in well-being documented by MOA research have been led by local government entities with significant support from coalitions of nonprofit organizations, service providers, businesses, and other government agencies. In Sonoma, this coalition was carefully assembled from existing networks in the county well before *A Portrait of Sonoma County* was even written. In Maricopa, MCESA's Youth Disconnection Summits in 2014 convened leaders from multiple sectors and used data from MOA reports to spread awareness of the challenge of youth disconnection facing the Phoenix area and begin to organize a collaborative response. In both cases, though, the leadership of

local government was critical for forming these broad coalitions in the first place. As Superintendent Covey has commented, “There has to be somebody who initiates, who starts the momentum,” to address a problem like youth disconnection (Brodie 2014). In both of these cases, that initiator has been local government.

Finally, the role of timing and preexisting momentum for certain policy changes cannot be ignored in considering why and how MOA local research may be having an impact. For example, one policy change encouraged by *A Portrait of Sonoma County* found expression in the Sonoma County board of supervisors’ decision to limit tobacco use. The issue of tobacco regulation had already been elevated in the county’s public consciousness since at least January 2014, when the influential American Lung Association, a health lobby group, released an evaluation of local tobacco control regulations that singled out many Sonoma communities for their poor performance. The *Portrait’s* findings and recommendations may have added to this existing momentum in favor of further regulating tobacco use in the county (Dadko, personal interview, December 4, 2014).

Similarly, in Phoenix, newly created funding opportunities designed to help communities address youth disconnection may have provided a financial incentive for policymakers to reframe existing challenges facing youth as “youth disconnection” challenges. For example, as mentioned above, the US Justice Department awarded a \$1.5 million grant in 2013 to the youth-serving public agencies in Maricopa, including MCESA, from a new federal government program to support programs for young people being released from juvenile detention (MCESA 2013). In December 2014, three federal government agencies jointly announced another new grant program to fund local pilot projects to improve the well-being of disconnected youth (FindYouthInfo.org 2014). Ideally, these new funding streams will encourage local policymakers to formulate policies to improve youth well-being in a more holistic way than in the past, with the meaningful participation of young people themselves.

## CONCLUSION

These case studies have provided two examples of communities where local-level well-being indicators from MOA research are being used to galvanize cross-community support for new policy initiatives, and give community leaders new tools to use in their advocacy, strategic planning,

and grant making. Analysis of these cases suggests a few key factors are behind the possible preliminary impacts of MOA research in Sonoma and Maricopa counties. One is the importance of having local elected officials and other community leaders take ownership of the findings, either during the research process, as in Sonoma, or after the release of data, as in Maricopa County. Data on local conditions in both these cases have helped foster local accountability for the aspects of well-being summarized by the MOA reports. Local officials who take ownership of the data can use their bully pulpits to publicize and build awareness of the issues the data illuminate and convene other leaders from inside and outside of government to coordinate responses (Morris, personal interview, December 5, 2014).

Another related factor is the vital role of local government as a driving force for propagating research findings and coordinating responses to the disparities revealed in these two cases, although a similar role might be played just as effectively by nongovernmental actors. Indeed, in both Sonoma and Maricopa, MOA research has been having an impact in part through the establishment of broad coalitions of organizations, including government agencies, community groups, and businesses, to organize collective action in response to challenges facing their communities. Still, in both these cases, it was local government that initiated and led the coalition-building process. Choosing research topics that were already in the public consciousness, or that could be framed in a way that tied into issues already of local and national concern, may also have helped MOA research gain traction and attention.

It must be stressed, however, that in very few cases has MOA research specifically been identified as the *cause* of any of the developments that have followed the release of the reports mentioned in the cases presented here. The progress toward improving the health of all residents of Sonoma County and reconnecting disconnected youth in the Phoenix metro area has, in largest part, been due to the extraordinary efforts of individuals and organizations who are working diligently on these issues at the local level.

Even so, both cases suggest having actionable data that are accessible to both nonexpert citizens and policymakers has been a boon to those working for change in these and other communities across the United States. For this reason alone, producing local-area data on vital aspects of well-being to facilitate this work at the grassroots level will remain central to the MOA approach to gauging well-being and opportunity in the United States.

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## NOTES

1. A version of this paper was presented at a seminar of the Interdisciplinary Study Group for Action Research on Citizen Autonomy and Community Empowerment at Kansai University in Osaka, Japan, on December 15, 2014. Thanks are due to professor Takayoshi Kusago at Kansai University and colleagues for providing the initial motivation and funding for its completion. The author also gratefully acknowledges Beth Dadko, program planning and evaluation analyst at the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, and Kristine Morris, chief deputy superintendent of the Maricopa County Education Service Agency, for agreeing to be interviewed for this paper. Thanks also to Kristen Lewis, Measure of America codirector, for helpful comments on early drafts.

2. While current debates in disciplines such as sociology, political science, and geography could undoubtedly provide a useful theoretical backdrop for this discussion, a literature review thorough enough to do them justice is well beyond the scope of this brief overview and will not be included here.

3. For more detail on the construction of the HD Index and data sources, see the methodological note from the most recent national MOA report, available at [http://www.measureofamerica.org/Measure\\_of\\_America2013-2014MethodNote.pdf](http://www.measureofamerica.org/Measure_of_America2013-2014MethodNote.pdf).

4. Census tracts are geographic units defined by the US Census Bureau for small-area statistical reporting. Sonoma County has ninety-nine inhabited census tracts with an average population of about five thousand residents.

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