

# THE MEASURE OF AMERICA

AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2008-2009

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## **FIRST AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT INTRODUCES NEW MEASUREMENT OF AMERICANS' WELL-BEING American Human Development Index Provides a Snapshot of America by State and Congressional Districts and Shows the American Dream In Peril**

Washington – A new report released today by the American Human Development Project introduces the American Human Development Index, a single measure of well-being for all Americans based on three key indicators: health, education and income. “The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009,” a robust peer-reviewed analysis, is the first-ever measure on the status of human development in the United States or any developed nation and provides a snapshot of Americans’ well-being by state, congressional district, gender, race and ethnicity.

The “Measure of America” reveals huge gaps in some Americans’ access to decent healthcare, a good education and job opportunities. Some groups of people are living anywhere from 30 to 50 years behind others when it comes to their opportunity to achieve the American Dream. For example, the state human development index shows that people in last-ranked Mississippi are living 30 years behind those in first-ranked Connecticut when it comes to access to healthcare, education and a decent standard of living.

“The American Human Development Index offers a clear and objective measure of how well our public and private policies are meeting the needs of Americans,” said Sarah Burd-Sharps, co-author of the report. “The data in this report can be used to build on past policy successes and to create opportunities that serve a new generation of Americans.”

Using U.S. government statistics on longevity, educational attainment and enrollment, and earnings, the report reveals where America is today and sets a benchmark against which we will be able to assess where we are tomorrow. Unlike single measurements of health, education or income, the American Human Development Index combines these factors into one measurement that more accurately reflects Americans’ quality of life. The report identifies which parts of the country are moving forward and which are stalled or even falling behind.

The American Human Development Report of 2008-2009 shows that even though America is one of the richest nations in the world, it is woefully behind when it comes to providing opportunity and choices to all Americans to build a life better than that of the previous generation. Following are just a few of the many findings of the report:

- In Texas’ 29th Congressional District the percentage of adult population with less than a high school degree is at about the level of the U.S. average in the early 1970s.
- Among the nation’s 436 congressional districts, New York’s 14th District (in Manhattan) ranks first and California’s 20th District (around Fresno) ranks last; the average resident of New York’s 14th District earns more than three times as much as the average California’s 20th District resident.
- Nationally, Asian males have the highest human development index score and African American males the lowest with a staggering 50-year gap between the two groups.
- Despite the fact that the United States spends roughly \$5.2 billion every day on health care, more per capita than any other nation in the world, Americans live shorter lives than citizens of many other countries – including every Western European and Nordic country.

“This is not a report about one or another group of Americans; it is about all of us,” said Kristen Lewis, co-author of the report. “By ranking the fifty states, the 436 congressional districts, and the major racial and ethnic groups, the American Human Development Index allows everyone to see where his or her community fits in terms of access to opportunity and standard of living.”

More than seventeen years after the first United Nations human development report was published, over 140 countries around the world have replicated the human development index for their country to better understand what is inhibiting human development and to use the data to develop policies that will improve their citizen’s standard of living. “The human development index is such an accepted standard that in Brazil, for example, the human development index of each team’s country was flashed on the screen during televised World Cup soccer matches,” said Eduardo Martins, co-author of the report.

“The Measure of America” is unique because it focuses not on a single issue, but broadens the analysis of the interlocking factors that fuel advantage and disadvantage, create opportunities, and determine life chances. The HDI is easy to understand and reflects what most people believe are the very basic ingredients of human well-being: health, education and income. The report contains key social, economic, political, environmental, housing, transportation and personal security data distilled from a vast array of primary sources not found together anywhere else. Finally, the report describes successful policies in America and other wealthy nations, allowing policy makers to draw practical lessons for policy action locally or nationally.

Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in Economics, 1998, stated in his foreword to the report, “We have to judge the success of a society, including its economy, not just in terms of national wealth or the ubiquitous GNP, but in terms of the freedoms and capabilities that people enjoy to live as they would value living. The United States is, in most ways of counting, the wealthiest nation in the world, and yet its accomplishments in longevity, secure health, fine education, and other such basic features of good living are considerably below those of many other – often much poorer – countries.”

“The Measure of America: American Human Development Report, 2008-2009” is published by Columbia University Press and The Social Science Research Council. The United Nations Development Programme has published a global report since 1990, but “The Measure of America” is the first look at the United States or any industrialized nation and will serve as a baseline to measure future progress.

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**Note to Editors:**

Go to <http://www.measureofamerica.org> for state news releases, U.S. American Human Development Index by state and Congressional districts, U.S. maps by state and Congressional districts for health, education and income indices, fact sheets, and video sound bites from co-authors and other key spokespersons and the Well-O-Meter, a tool to determine your personal human development index.

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