Office of the Comptroller of the Currency

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Remarks at the
Inclusive Finance for Development: 15 Years of Impact
Hosted by United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development

"What Gets Measured Gets Managed"

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What gets measured gets managed.

This is, in part, the logic and the power of the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.[1] They convert the UN's broad vision of sustainable development into actionable, measurable components. Notably, *financial inclusion* is in eight of those goals, reflecting its criticality to development and progress for all people.[2]

In the U.S., the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation conducted in 2009 its first national survey of "unbanked and underbanked" households and found that 7.6 percent of U.S. households, or 17 million adults, were "unbanked," meaning they lacked a basic bank account.[3] Since that study, the percentage of unbanked households has declined steadily to 4.5 percent, with over three million families being brought into the formal banking system. What gets measured gets managed.[4]

[1] "The 17 Goals," Division of Sustainable Development Goals, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

[2] "Financial Inclusion," UN Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development.

[3] "2009 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households," FDIC.

[4] "2021 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households," FDIC.

Progress on financial inclusion in the U.S. has given rise to a different set of challenges, however. Inclusion is necessary, but not sufficient to lift people up. Focusing only on inclusion can mask exploitation via predatory lending and high-cost debt traps. For some people, access to certain financial products can cause harm rather than create opportunity.

Why do such products get developed and marketed? Again, what gets measured gets managed. Maximizing metrics primarily focused on growth, engagement, and profitability can help with business but can hurt people. What can we do to strike a better balance?

Enter financial health. For years, a core group of advocates, researchers, and policymakers—like Queen Maxima—have focused on the concept of financial health to put *people* first, going beyond mere inclusion and getting to the heart of what really matters to people and their communities. To date, most measures of financial health have been gathered through annual surveys, providing trend data and insights on people's savings, spending, borrowing, and planning.[5]

This work has been profound, but I believe we can do more, leveraging available data and analytics.

In medicine, we have long relied on four vital signs to provide an accurate, real-time picture of people's physical health: temperature, blood pressure, respiration, and pulse rate. These data points can be gathered quickly and easily. Imagine if we could do the same for people's financial health.

[5] See, for example, the Financial Health Network's "Financial Health Pulse."

This is the goal of the OCC's Financial Health Vital Signs initiative. We recently released a paper laying out the research on financial health and making the case for financial health vital signs.[6]

We now need stakeholders' help in piloting and testing this idea.

What gets measured gets managed. By developing people-centered metrics that measure their financial health and well-being, I believe we can accelerate the progress that's been made to date on financial inclusion and sharpen it so that it improves long-term financial outcomes for individuals and their communities.

[6] "Community Developments Insights: How Banks Can Measure and Support Customer Financial Health Outcomes," OCC, June 2024.