UN EVENT HIGHLIGHTS USE OF "BIG DATA" IN DEVELOPMENT WORK

UN Global Pulse initiative launches report on research showing digital data's potential in revolutionizing development work.

NEW YORK, NY (9 July 2012) - The era of Big Data presents the United Nations with an historic opportunity to better support and protect populations through analysis of digital information.

That's the message of *Big Data for Development: Opportunities and Challenges,* a new report from UN Global Pulse, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's innovation initiative for leveraging digital data sources and real-time analytics in service of global development work. The report is the culmination of Global Pulse's collaborations with the best researchers in the field to explore how data science can be used for international development, constituting a genuine opportunity to bring powerful new tools to the fight against poverty, hunger and disease.

The central question of this ongoing research is how the massive amounts of data being generated by the use of digital services - such as mobiles phones, social media etc. - can be leveraged by the development sector. This is especially crucial in developing countries, where real-time information about population well-being could help the United Nations and partner organizations make its programs more responsive, using new approaches to address regressions before they become full-blown crises.

"This is not about if or when this type of research will be applicable to the way the UN works, it's about how," says Robert Kirkpatrick, Global Pulse Director. "The various examples highlighted in this report show that we are already well on our way to figuring out how to harness Big Data for development."

The launch will take place at UN headquarters in New York at 10:00 on Tuesda, 10 July. The event will be opened by Robert C. Orr, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, and include a presentation by network analysis expert Dr. Jukka-Pekka Onnela, Assistant Professor of Biostatistics at Harvard University. The event will be webcast at: http://unglobalpulse.org/participate/events.

Global Pulse's work is focused on highlighting the opportunities new sources of digital data represent for improving international development work. Its collaborators in this effort to date have included research & analytics companies like SAS, Crimson Hexagon, PriceStats and Jana, in addition to the UN agencies that are

working with Global Pulse to prototype and test the new approaches.

Preliminary research has already explored how social media chatter can be an early indicator of spikes in unemployment in the US & Ireland, and that the price of food commodities mined from websites closely matches the official Consumer Price Index in six Latin America. Research has also shown that the volume of Tweets related to the price of rice in Indonesia mirrored food price inflation statistics, demonstrating that social media can be a useful early-warning for how people are faring and coping with food price volatility.

Global Pulse will continue to work with partners through a "Big Data for Development" campaign to mobilize interested experts from private sector and academia who can contribute data, tools or resources to ongoing applied research projects. Global Pulse is also working with UN agencies and Member States in establishing a global network of Pulse Labs where promising research can be further tested and implemented.

"Big Data is not just a buzzword for the business world or the data research community anymore," says Kirkpatrick. "The same data and analytical tools which have been developed in the private sector and academia have real applications and opportunities for understanding and responding to global problems like poverty, hunger and disease."

About Global Pulse

Global Pulse is a United Nations initiative, launched by the Secretary-General in 2009, to help decision-makers gain a real-time understanding of how crises impact vulnerable populations. Global Pulse functions as an innovation lab, bringing together expertise from inside and outside the UN to harness today's new world of digital data and real-time analytics for global development and early-warning. The initiative contributes to a future in which access to better information sooner makes it possible to keep international development on track, protect the world's most vulnerable populations, and strengthen resilience to global shocks.

For more information, go to: www.unglobalpulse.org

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For media inquiries about Global Pulse, contact:
Anoush Rima Tatevossian
Strategic Communications Officer, Global Pulse
+1 646-723-4806
tatevossian@un.org