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Ban urges greater use of data and new technologies to tackle global crises



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today called for greater use of the latest real-time data tools and new technologies to facilitate development and anticipate crises before their impacts become sources of human suffering.

“Too often, by the time we have hard evidence of what is happening at the household level, the harm has already been done,” [said](#) Mr. Ban during a briefing for the General Assembly on the Global Pulse initiative, which focuses on harnessing real-time data and new technologies for agile global development.

“Our inability to understand the impacts of a crisis while there is still time to adjust our policies and programmes threatens to reverse years of hard-won development gains,” he said, pointing out that the irony is that with the explosion of mobile telephones and other digital services there is a vast amount of real-time information already available.

The idea behind this initiative is simple – once we know what signals to listen for, we will be able to ‘take the pulse’ of vulnerable communities.

“The private sector is analyzing this new data to understand its customers in real-time. The United Nations must do the same for its constituents – people around the world who are losing jobs, getting sick and having difficulty feeding themselves and their families.”

Global Pulse, which is managed by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, functions as an innovation lab, bringing together expertise from inside and outside the UN to learn how the latest advances in data science and technology can yield new insights for decision-makers and improve resilience to the impacts of fast-moving socio-economic crises.

“The idea behind this initiative is simple – once we know what signals to listen for, we will be able to ‘take the pulse’ of vulnerable communities,” said Mr. Ban. “This rapid feedback will help us understand where people and communities are in trouble, how they are coping with global shocks, and how to respond while there is still time to prevent harm.”

“The time has come for us to bring the work of the United Nations fully into the Digital Age. Global Pulse is a chance for us to innovate and demonstrate leadership,” he added.

The President of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, said the UN is uniquely positioned to be a catalyst for learning how to apply innovative technologies to address new development challenges.

“The role of science, technology and innovation in achieving sustainable development cannot be overemphasized,” said Mr. Al-Nasser. “However, this role is currently not yet fully exploited and needs more attention,” he said, adding that Global Pulse is an example of how the UN can harness global innovation to protect the poor and other vulnerable groups.

The Director of Global Pulse, Robert Kirkpatrick, said that Member States’ involvement is critical to the success of the initiative. “Much of the innovation required to power Global Pulse is coming from the Global South. We need our Member State partners to help us seize this new opportunity.”

“In the 21st century, the use of real-time information from new digital sources is crucial to the design of effective programme and policy responses. It will become an essential part of our work in the years ahead,” said Mr. Kirkpatrick.

Global Pulse’s implementation strategy includes working with Member States to establish a network of “Pulse Labs” to explore the potential of new sources of data and scale up successful approaches. Indonesia and Uganda are setting up the first two labs in Jakarta and Kampala.

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