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WORLD BANK GROUP



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NEWS RELEASE

United Nations, World Bank, and Humanitarian Organizations Launch Innovative Partnership to End Famine

Global Technology Firms to Provide Expertise on Frontier Technology to Better Predict Famines

WASHINGTON, September 23, 2018 —The United Nations, World Bank, International Committee of the Red Cross, Microsoft, Google and Amazon Web Services today announced an unprecedented global partnership to prevent future famines.

The international organizations, with support from leading global technology firms, are launching the Famine Action Mechanism (FAM) – the first global mechanism dedicated to preventing future famines. In the past, responses to these devastating events has often come too late, once many lives have already been lost, incurring high assistance costs. The FAM seeks to change this by moving towards famine prevention, preparedness and early action – interventions that can save more lives and reduce humanitarian costs by as much as 30%. The initiative will use the predictive power of data to trigger funding through appropriate financing instruments, working closely with existing systems.

In 2017, more than 20 million people across north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen faced famine or famine-like conditions, the result of a complex intersection of conflict, poverty, climate change and food prices. These conditions continue in many parts of the world today, derailing hard-won development gains in chronically poor countries. Today, 124 million people live in crisis levels of food insecurity, requiring urgent humanitarian assistance for their survival. Over half of them live in areas affected by conflict.

“The Famine Action Mechanism, FAM, is an important new tool that will help to predict and therefore prevent food insecurity and famine before they have a chance to take hold. Crisis prevention saves lives. With the Famine Action Mechanism, we are renewing our pledge to Zero Tolerance for famine and acute food insecurity,” said **United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres**.

“The fact that millions of people – many of them children – still suffer from severe malnutrition and famine in the 21st century is a global tragedy,” **World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim** said. *“We are forming an unprecedented global coalition to say, ‘no more.’ The Famine Action Mechanism is a preventative approach that knits together innovative technology, early financing, and strong partnerships on the ground in an effort to prevent famine. It will help us deploy our combined resources to protect the*

poorest and most vulnerable, and it will allow us to refocus our collective attention on the millions of chronically food-insecure people who suffer each year.”

“The ICRC, working on frontlines around the world, sees the deep suffering inflicted by conflict and violence. Famine is often a devastating symptom of protracted war. We are hopeful that new models of collaboration such as this will bring new solutions and reduce food insecurity at scale,” said **ICRC President Peter Maurer**.

The FAM will promote investments that tackle the root causes of famine at the first warning signs. It will help build vulnerable people’s livelihoods, safety nets and coping mechanisms. In the last decade, the Bank has invested up to \$3 billion annually in food security initiatives and will be looking for additional ways to increase these investments in future projects and programs.

The FAM will use state-of-the-art technology to provide more powerful early warning to identify when food crises threaten to turn into famines. These alerts will trigger pre-arranged funding and action plans by donors, humanitarian agencies and governments to generate earlier and more efficient interventions.

“If we can better predict when and where future famines will occur, we can save lives by responding earlier and more effectively,” said **Brad Smith, President of Microsoft**. *“Artificial intelligence and machine learning hold huge promise for forecasting and detecting early signs of food shortages, like crop failures, droughts, natural disasters, and conflicts. Microsoft is proud to join Amazon and Google in developing solutions to address this humanitarian need.”*

Google, Microsoft and Amazon Web Services and other technology firms are providing the world’s top expertise to develop a suite of analytical models called “Artemis” that use advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning to estimate and forecast worsening food security crises in real-time. These forecasts will help guide and promote decision makers to respond earlier.

“Artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies can be a powerful force for good, and we’ve already seen that they have the potential to help farmers identify disease in cassava plants, keep cows healthier and more productive, and integrate overall relief efforts. Google is proud to partner with the World Bank on the Famine Action Mechanism to help prevent future famine in communities around the world,” said **Kent Walker, Google’s Senior Vice President of Global Affairs and Chief Legal Officer**.

“We are proud to play a role in the FAM initiative, and to work collaboratively to solve one of the world’s most pressing issues,” said **Teresa Carlson, Vice President of Worldwide Public Sector, Amazon Web Services, Inc.** *“Public-private collaborations like this one allow us to collectively bring cutting-edge technology to leading humanitarian organizations, giving them innovative tools to predict and prevent famine, and to ultimately save lives.”*

The FAM builds on the World Bank’s experience and commitment to better forecast risks and prevent crises of all types before they occur. In July, the World Bank Group Board endorsed the Global Crisis Risk Platform, a new platform for identifying risks before they become full blown crises. The Platform incorporates prevention and preparedness into client country development strategies and is being used to get ahead of global crises such as famine, Ebola and other natural and man-made disasters.

The FAM also builds on the United Nations efforts to prioritize prevention, and its efforts to address risks more systematically. It also aligns with the recently adopted Security Council Resolution 2417 on the links between conflict-induced food insecurity and the threat of famine.

The FAM will initially be rolled out in a small group of vulnerable countries building up to ultimately provide global coverage. On October 13, leaders dedicated to this initiative will gather as part of the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings to discuss further implementation of the FAM.

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