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UN Big Data Climate Challenge winners show how big data can drive climate action

2 September 2014 (NEW YORK) – The United Nations today announced the winners of the “Big Data Climate Challenge” as part of the buildup to the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Summit on 23 September at UN Headquarters in New York.

The winners include a monitoring system that provides real-time information on forests, and a tool for farmers in Colombia that promotes climate-smart agriculture. The winners will be invited to attend the Climate Summit.

The Big Data Climate Challenge is a global competition hosted by United Nations Global Pulse, an initiative of the Secretary-General on big data. The Challenge was launched in May 2014 to unearth fresh evidence of the economic dimensions of climate change around the world using data and analytics. Submissions were received from 40 countries, representing more than 20 topics from forestry, biodiversity and transportation to renewable energy and green data centers.

Two overall Big Data Climate Challenge winners and seven “Projects to Watch” were selected by a high-level Advisory Board and Technical Committee of global experts in climate science, sustainable development and big data. Submissions were evaluated on their use of big data, economic relevance, stakeholder engagement, originality and scalability. The “Projects to Watch” were chosen to highlight particularly innovative uses of big data in emerging topics and geographic regions.

Big Data Climate Challenge Winners:

- “Global Forest Watch” (GFW) is a dynamic forest monitoring system from the World Resources Institute and partners: GFW empowers people to manage forests by

combining satellite imaging, open data and crowdsourcing for open access to timely information about forests by governments, companies, NGOs and the public.

(www.globalforestwatch.org/)

- Climate-smart, site-specific agriculture decision-making tool for Colombian rice farmers by the Site-Specific Agriculture Big Data Team at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT): Using harvest monitoring data with climate data and seasonal forecasts, farming recommendations for rice growers are generated as a first step toward a system to support decision-making for farmers. (www.aclimatecolombia.org/)

“Projects to Watch”:

- “Urban services monitoring (UrSMS)” by development consultancy Taru in collaboration with Surat Municipal Corporation and Urban Health Climate Resilience Center (UHCRC) in India
- “Big Earth Observation Data for Climate Change Research” by a research team at Institute of Remote Sensing and Digital Earth, Chinese Academy of Sciences
- “Using Big Data and Google Directions to show CO2 Emissions from Transport” by researchers at University of Skopje Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering and UNDP Macedonia. (contest.msdev.finki.ukim.mk/)
- “Development under Climate Change (DUCC),” an application of the Systematic Analysis of Climate Resilient Development (SACRED) framework to quantify economic impacts of climate change in South Africa submitted by United Nations University (UNU) WIDER in Finland
- “SmartSpaces” energy monitoring system in municipal buildings by Bristol City Energy Services in the UK as part of a European initiative implemented in 11 cities. (www.smartspaces.eu/home/)
- “Data and Computational Tools to Build Low-Carbon, Sustainable Energy Systems” by a research team at Renewable and Appropriate Energy Lab at University of California Berkeley with projects implemented in United States, South America and Asia. (rael.berkeley.edu/)
- “Megacities Carbon Project” by a research team from NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Arizona State University, Laboratoire des Sciences du Climat et de l’Environnement (LSCE), Resources for the Future, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), California Institute of Technology, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and the California Air Resources Board (megacities.jpl.nasa.gov/portal/)

Representatives from the two winning teams will be invited to the UN Climate Summit, where their research will be shared with Heads of State as well as global business leaders and civil society leaders. Both of the Big Data Climate Challenge Winners and the “Projects to Watch” will be featured on the UN Climate Summit website.

“Big data helps us more deeply understand how climate change can affect our economies, land, health and issues of inequality—with the ultimate aim of delivering solutions, it can empower individuals, communities and policy-makers to make more informed decisions,” said Tracy Raczek, Senior Policy Advisor on Climate in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. “In the case of the Big Data Climate Challenge Winner on climate-smart agriculture, big data gives farmers valuable information on planting times which can lead to more productive growing seasons; and to the other winner, Global Forest Watch, provides multiple end-users timely data on deforestation. This can inform actions that affect short term deforestation, local economies, and long term changes to our climate.”

The Big Data Climate Challenge was inspired by the UN Climate Summit, which will convene leaders from Governments as well as public and private sectors to catalyze climate action. A new wave of climate action powered by big data and analytics is emerging. The Big Data Climate Challenge brings together these fields of big data and climate change in preparation for the Climate Summit.

The Big Data Climate Challenge Winners and “Projects to Watch” demonstrate that scalable, data-driven climate solutions exist globally, and such solutions can inspire leaders from all sectors and all parts of the world to galvanize toward a safer, healthier, more equitable and resilient future.

For more information on the UN Climate Summit, visit www.un.org/climatechange/summit/.

To learn about the Big Data Climate Challenge and UN Global Pulse, visit www.unglobalpulse.org/big-data-climate.

About UN Global Pulse

Global Pulse is an innovation initiative of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, exploring how new data sources and real-time analytics can help policymakers gain new insights into emerging vulnerabilities and changes in human well-being. Global Pulse is playing a leading role in helping the UN and other development partners adapt the new opportunities created by Big Data to meet the challenges of driving sustainable development. Through public-private partnerships, innovative analysis and open-source technology development, Global Pulse is strengthening public sector capacity to leverage digital big data for development and resilience. With innovation centers known as Pulse Labs, in New York, Jakarta and Kampala, Global Pulse leverages big data to address topics such as: public health, economic well-being, agriculture & food security, urban resilience and humanitarian action. For more information about Global Pulse, visit www.unglobalpulse.org/.

About UN Climate Summit

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is hosting the Climate Summit on 23 September 2014 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Summit will mark the first time in five years that world leaders will get together to chart a bold, new course of action on climate change. Heads of state and government will join leaders from business and civil society to announce new commitments and practical actions to address climate change. The Summit will consist of an opening ceremony, announcements by heads of state and governments, announcements by the private sector, the launch of new initiatives that address key action areas by coalitions of governments, businesses and civil society organizations. There will also be sessions that focus on critical aspects of climate change, including science, people living on the frontlines of climate change, the societal benefits of action, and the economic case for action on climate change. The Secretary-General will summarize the outcome of the day at the closing ceremony. For more information about the Secretary-General’s 2014 Climate Summit, please visit www.un.org/climatechange/summit/.

For the full list of Big Data Climate Challenge Advisory Board and Technical Committee members, visit www.unglobalpulse.org/BDCC-advisory-board.