PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 13 July 2020 - 6:00 AM ET

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World's First Collaborative Fund to Correct Gaps and Biases in Data for Artificial Intelligence Launches Today

Lacuna Fund pools funding from philanthropies, public agencies, and the private sector to mobilize labeled datasets that solve urgent problems in low- and middle-income contexts globally.

Lacuna Fund launched today with a pooled fund of $4 million to support the creation, expansion, and maintenance of labeled datasets, initially in three key sectors: agriculture, health, and languages. The first funding call, also released today, seeks proposals related to agricultural datasets in sub-Saharan Africa. Lacuna Fund encourages organizations with a social impact mission and an expertise in data collection and labelling to apply. More details about the eligibility criteria and scope of the first RFP can be found at lacunafund.org/apply.

Lacuna Fund began as a funder collaborative between The Rockefeller Foundation, Google.org, and Canada's International Development Research Centre, with an upcoming call for proposals on underserved languages also supported by the German development agency GIZ on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It has since evolved into a multi-stakeholder engagement composed of technical experts, thought leaders, local beneficiaries, and end users. Collectively, we are committed to creating and mobilizing labeled datasets that both solve urgent local problems and lead to a step change in machine learning's potential worldwide.

- "Labeled datasets have fueled massive innovation in machine learning over the last decade," said Evan Tachovsky, Lead Data Scientist and Director of Innovation at the Rockefeller Foundation. "However, people and problems from low-income countries have been left out of these datasets and in turn haven't benefited from new technology. We're proud to launch the Lacuna Fund to close these data gaps and fuel the next generation of machine learning that works for all."

- "Most data doesn't come from here [the African continent], or from people like me," said Vukosi Marivate, ABSA Chair of Data Science at University of Pretoria. "Typically data doesn't take locality into account. But if you take language for example, language captures culture. It captures what we value. We need more data for languages other than Latin languages, and we need to

collect it in a way that's shareable. This is about preservation. Otherwise most world languages won't continue to exist."

- "In the AI research and innovation work that IDRC supports, a constraint that comes up time and time again is the lack of high-quality, locally relevant labelled datasets," said Matthew Smith, Senior Program Specialist at Canada's International Development Research Center (IDRC). "We will be launching AI innovation research networks in different domains. But if we launch them and they don't have good data to work from, then they're not set up for success."

- "The goal is open datasets. But this is bigger than just creating the datasets," said Daphne Luong, Director of Engineering at Google AI Research. "We want to create innovative, scalable and replicable data protocols, so they can be applied to different data domains as well as other geographical regions. Eventually we hope that more representative and accessible data will allow machine learning to better serve communities worldwide."

- "Lacuna Fund is unique—it's truly a breakthrough for machine learning researchers," said Dina Machuve, Lecturer at Nelson Mandela African Institute of Science and Technology and a member of the Data Science Africa Secretariat. "There may even be emerging researchers that we discover as a result of the Fund's calls for proposals as the Fund fosters a growing community."

- "Local ownership and capacity building are two of the cornerstones of German development cooperation," said Lea Gimpel, co-lead of the "FAIR Forward -- Artificial Intelligence for All" initiative at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). "The Lacuna Fund offers the exciting opportunity to support local communities in their existing and nascent work to create and maintain open datasets for the development of AI solutions geared towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs)."

- "Google.org helps bring the benefits of technology to everyone through funding, innovation, and expertise. We've seen firsthand the barrier to new solutions that a lack of labeled datasets addressing local problems presents," said Micah Berman, Manager at Google.org. "As we launch this Fund, we're looking forward to joining alongside our collaborators and organizations in low-and-middle-income contexts to grow their capacity to collect, curate, and own data relevant to their needs -- ultimately unlocking the power of AI to deliver new social sector solutions."

About Lacuna Fund: Machine learning has shown great potential to revolutionize solutions to critical problems, but in low- and middle-income contexts globally, a shortage of representative, labeled data puts the benefits out of reach. Lacuna Fund is the world's first collaborative effort to directly address this problem.

Guided by machine learning professionals worldwide, Lacuna Fund will provide data scientists, researchers, and social entrepreneurs in the region and their partners with the resources they need to

either produce new labeled datasets to address an underserved population or problem, augment existing datasets to be more representative, or update old datasets to be more sustainable.

Learn more at http://www.lacunafund.org.

About The Rockefeller Foundation: The Rockefeller Foundation advances new frontiers of science, data, policy and innovation to solve global challenges related to health, food, power and economic mobility. As a science-driven philanthropy focused on building collaborative relationships with partners and grantees, the Foundation seeks to inspire and foster large-scale human impact that promotes the well-being of humanity throughout the world by identifying and accelerating breakthrough solutions, ideas and conversations. For more information, sign up for our newsletter at rockefellerfoundation.org and follow us on Twitter @RockefellerFdn.

About Google.org: Google.org supports nonprofits that address humanitarian issues and apply scalable, data-driven innovation to solving the world's biggest challenges. We accelerate their progress by connecting them with a unique blend of support that includes funding, products, and technical expertise from Google volunteers. We engage with these believers-turned-doers who make a significant impact on the communities they represent, and whose work has the potential to produce meaningful change. We want a world that works for everyone—and we believe technology and innovation can move the needle.

About Canada's International Development Research Centre: The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) funds research in the Global South to promote growth, reduce poverty, and drive large-scale positive change. As part of Canada's foreign affairs and development efforts, we are a Crown corporation that provides leading thinkers the resources, advice, and training they need to implement and share their solutions with those who need them most. In short, IDRC increases opportunities — and makes a real difference in people's lives.

About GIZ and FAIR Forward -- Artificial Intelligence for All: "FAIR Forward – Artificial Intelligence for All" is a German Development Cooperation initiative striving for a more open, inclusive and sustainable approach to AI on an international level. It is funded by Germany's national AI strategy, and assists partner countries in building sustainable AI ecosystems, focusing on skills & education, access to AI training data and the development of ethical AI policies. In doing so, FAIR Forward supports the provision of open, non-discriminatory and inclusive training data and open-source AI applications, especially in local languages to empower marginalized groups.

About Meridian Institute: Meridian Institute is a mission-driven nonprofit that has helped our clients and partners develop and implement solutions to complicated, often controversial problems—big and small, global and local—for over two decades. Meridian serves as the secretariat and fiscal agent for Lacuna Fund. Learn more at merid.org.

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