WORLD BANK GROUP

Fondazione Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice

WORLD BANK GROUP – CENTESIMUS ANNUS PRO PONTIFICE FOUNDATION
"A HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE: MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS AND THE WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2026".
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Background and Rationale

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping economies, labor markets and societies. Beyond technological change, it raises fundamental questions about the future of work, the distribution of economic opportunity, the concentration of technological power, and the ability of people and countries to participate in and benefit from a rapidly changing global economy.

Pope Leo XIV's 2026 encyclical ***Magnifica Humanitas*** places these transformations within a broader reflection on their human implications. Coming 135 years after *Rerum Novarum* confronted the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution, the encyclical underscores the importance of ensuring that technological progress remains at the service of the human person, including in the changing world of work.

These questions are particularly consequential for developing countries. Over the next 10–15 years, **1.2 billion young people will reach working age in developing economies, while only around 400 million jobs are projected to be created**. AI will transform many jobs and may displace some, but it also has the potential to raise productivity, expand access to scarce expertise and put new capabilities in the hands of workers, entrepreneurs and public institutions.

The **World Development Report 2026, *The Promise of Artificial Intelligence*,** provides new evidence on this transformation. It finds that jobs in developing economies are significantly less exposed to automation by generative AI than those in advanced economies: around **4.5 percent of existing jobs are at risk of automation, while 16.2 percent could see their productivity meaningfully enhanced by AI**. For developing countries, the greatest promise may therefore lie not in replacing workers, but in **amplifying what people can do**.

Against this backdrop, the World Bank Group (WBG) and the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation (CAPP) propose a joint presentation and discussion of the WDR 2026, bringing its findings into dialogue with *Magnifica Humanitas*. The event would be the first in a series of joint initiatives underpinning the emerging WBG–CAPP partnership on Jobs, Opportunity and Development, creating a platform for continued dialogue on some of the major economic and social transformations shaping development.

From AI Potential to Development Opportunity

Much of the global debate on AI is dominated by the technological frontier. The WDR offers a different perspective for developing countries. Most do not need to develop frontier models to benefit substantially from AI. Instead, the report proposes a pragmatic pathway: **Adopt, Adapt, Advance**—using existing technologies, adapting them to local languages, data, institutions and needs, and progressively building the capabilities to innovate and advance.

A particularly important opportunity lies in **"small AI"**: practical and affordable applications capable of addressing concrete local problems, including where computing resources and connectivity are constrained. AI can help farmers make better crop decisions, health workers improve diagnosis, teachers support learning, businesses become more productive and governments deliver services more effectively.

This potential is already visible. The WDR documents applications ranging from AI-supported medical screening in Bangladesh and agricultural forecasting in India to an AI tutoring system in Ghana designed for basic phones and weak connectivity. These examples point to **AI as a means of extending human capability and putting scarce knowledge and expertise within reach of more people. This emphasis on technology as a tool that can strengthen what people are able to do provides an important point of dialogue with *Magnifica Humanitas* and its call for technological progress to remain at the service of the human person.**

But opportunity is not automatic. Countries need **electricity, connectivity, skills, data and capable institutions**, as well as an environment in which firms can innovate and invest. Without these foundations, AI could instead widen inequalities, concentrate market power and create new forms of technological dependence. **The question is therefore not only how rapidly AI advances, but how widely its benefits are shared and whether countries and communities have the capacity to shape and use these technologies themselves.**

This is where the WDR and *Magnifica Humanitas*, from their distinct perspectives, offer a particularly relevant basis for dialogue. The WDR provides evidence on the conditions under which AI can contribute to productivity and development; *Magnifica Humanitas* brings attention to its consequences for work, human agency and inclusion. Together, they open a conversation about how technological progress can expand rather than constrain people's opportunities and capabilities.

Objectives and Discussion

The event would have a dual purpose: to **present the principal findings and policy messages of the World Development Report 2026 to the Holy See, CAPP and a wider audience of economic and institutional leaders**, and to bring those findings into dialogue with the reflections of *Magnifica Humanitas*.

The discussion would focus on three interconnected issues: AI's implications for jobs and human capability; the potential of small, affordable and locally adapted AI to expand opportunity in developing countries; and the investments, institutions and international cooperation needed to prevent countries and people from being left behind.

The event would also provide an opportunity to discuss how the World Bank Group is supporting countries to build the foundations for digital transformation, including through **@A Billion**, which aims to reach one billion people by 2030 through broadband and digitally enabled services.