Correspondence

Involve citizens in climate-policy modelling

The latest draft of the working-group report on mitigating climate change is now open for review by governments and scientists, as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment. We think it is now time to include citizens' views. Despite some progress since the 2014 assessment, non-scientists are barely represented in the integrated modelling studies that underpin such reports. Their involvement has long been promised.

The Paris agreement in 2015 was a great opportunity to bring the public into decision-making. But, despite consultations, there have been few mentions of citizens in the multi-model analyses published since. As Andrew Isaac Meso has pointed out (*Nature* **588**, 220; 2020), last year's US election highlighted a divergence in the opinions of scientists and those of the public. Researchers cannot afford to be seen as aloof and should include wider society in scientific processes: citizens must feel that they are heard.

Promises to engage the public in inclusive and transparent dialogue are all very well, but we must now put these ideas into practice.

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Peace-making: new technologies are no panacea

For peace-making, artificial-intelligence and data-driven approaches (see, for example, W. Guo *et al. Nature* **562**, 331–333; 2018) should be viewed only as complements to the existing international architecture (see go.nature.com/3q13tpe). To predict and prevent war, political will and policy innovations are still necessary.

Digital tools have not addressed the needs of the millions of civilians living through conflicts in Syria or Yemen. They have made little difference in 'frozen' conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Cyprus or the Balkans, or to regressing peace processes in Cambodia or Colombia. They risk shifting early-warning, peace-keeping and peace-building systems to a technical level, overriding hard-won compromises and inadvertently supporting the status quo.

Furthermore, these tools offer the temptation to govern war and manage risk from afar. This increases the potential for new forms of digital colonialism. They can wrongly imply that communities affected by conflict are resilient. These tools are not apolitical, nor are they detached from economic interests (O. P. Richmond and I. Tellidis *Globalizations* **17**, 935–952; 2020).

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Vaccination: keep records secure with blockchain

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is launching a system of digital 'passports' as proof that passengers have been vaccinated against COVID-19 (see go.nature.com/2ke7rhv). The data are stored on the traveller's electronic device, which seems barely more advanced than the decades-old international paper certificate of vaccination or prophylaxis. Furthermore, uploading the data to an IATA or technology-company database risks compromising security and confidentiality.

Critics have questioned the ethics of using proof of vaccination for personal advantage (N. Kofler and F. Baylis *Nature* **581**, 379-381; 2020). In this and other respects, blockchain technology would offer a superior data-storage system for vaccination records. A decentralized blockchain ledger would be anonymous, immutable and transparent. Entries can be publicly audited. Anonymity is protected, with access only with a private key or authorized biometrics. Storage is a non-issue, because data are not controlled by a centralized authority.

That said, issuing 'immunity passports' might be premature — first we need more information on the immunity conferred by different COVID-19 vaccines and the impact of SARS-CoV-2 variants.

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Tech firms need Black AI scholars and labour rights

As members of the Labor Tech Research Network, we share concerns about Timnit Gebru's exit in December 2020 from Google, where she researched the ethics of artificial intelligence (AI; see go.nature.com/3ila). This has adverse implications for Black women working in tech companies, which are already known for their lack of diversity (see *Nature* **589**, 12–13; 2021).

The research of Gebru and others has revealed the shortcomings of facial recognition for dark-skinned people, how automation can both replicate and obfuscate discrimination and how algorithmic systems reproduce racial exclusion and environmental racism. AI-ethics scholars cannot do their jobs properly if such conclusions could result in dismissal.

Given the potential for bias to creep into AI systems (see go.nature.com/3sxn), tech companies have a societal responsibility to retain critical voices. They should publicly affirm that all workers can pursue collective action, as is their right by law. And they should appoint independent ethics boards of seasoned researchers who can speak publicly on related issues and make formal recommendations to the governing board. To uphold the future of AI ethics, they should open the company to outside researchers and support underfunded tech-education programmes, including those at historically Black institutions.

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*On behalf of 5 correspondents; see go.nature.com/3pymd8z.