

Readers respond

Correspondence

Community power can boost vaccine uptake

Vaccine hesitancy must not be allowed to widen the racial and ethnic disparities already exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (see go.nature.com/2k3kpmc). Health organizations and technology firms should discuss and share their decisions with relevant communities, who are often astute at conveying health messages to their members.

This would give communities more power to communicate in a culturally appropriate way and by use of familiar faces. When community members, especially local health-care providers, educate and advise each other about vaccines, acceptance increases (S. C. Quinn *et al. Health Educ. Res.* **32**, 473–486; 2017).

Communities often use stories and art to embody emotions and immediacy, and to convey information and ideas in ways that statistics cannot. Black Americans who have survived breast cancer have used this tactic to encourage participation in breast screening; other successes include stopping smoking and managing hypertension and diabetes (A. F. Lipsey *et al. Patient Educ. Couns.* **103**, 1922–1934; 2020).

These stories and expressions are best delivered in person at venues such as community health centres and churches, or at local events. Although technology alone cannot resolve the inequities of the pandemic, communities already have their own ‘virtual-friendly’ educational tools.

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Reshoring EU agriculture risks undermining SDGs

Increasing agricultural production in the European Union while reducing imports implicated in tropical deforestation (see R. Fuchs *et al. Nature* **586**, 671–673; 2020) risks undermining the United Nations’ sustainable development goals (SDGs). These include the reduction of poverty and hunger, and the conservation of ecosystems.

Expanding the EU’s agricultural land by millions of hectares would negatively affect the region’s ecosystems. It would also increase global land needs owing to the lower efficiencies of many European crops (E. Meijaard *et al. Nature Plants* **6**, 1418–1426; 2020).

Meeting global SDGs requires a coherent approach. Consistent worldwide production standards and forest protection are important goals; both require fair engagement through trade agreements that reward conscientious producers and traders. Even if major consumers such as China and India were to apply such standards, disengagement would not stop deforestation until we can offer viable alternative livelihoods for those who depend on these practices. The EU must avoid isolationism and support those willing to attain good production standards, wherever they are.

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COVID-19: research on tech habits needs industry support

The consumption of digital entertainment such as online gaming has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are concerns that long engagement in these activities could strengthen bad habits and create social difficulties once the crisis has subsided – particularly for vulnerable or underage individuals.

Academic research has struggled to investigate how this surge in digital-media consumption is affecting mental health and well-being. Global technology companies have benefited financially from lockdowns. Their capacity to target online products that sustain habits could also yield insights into indicators of harm. Industry collaboration with researchers has the potential to create harm-reducing interventions. For too long, policy debates have focused on the industry’s negative impacts, rather than on its potential for positive change.

Digital media need science at the forefront of the development cycle. In turn, companies could provide researchers with crucial information, by, say, sharing data on highly engaged populations. Such collaborations will advance knowledge of the risks of digital-media use during and after the pandemic, and thus enhance organized efforts to help vulnerable people.

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Decentralize the energy system so COVID does not slow clean energy

I contend that a decentralized energy system could offer a reliable and sustainable way to increase investment in clean energy in these difficult economic times (see A. Goldthau and L. Hughes *Nature* **585**, 28–30; 2020).

Such a framework would favour small-scale, low-carbon projects. It would insist on strict regulations for transferring energy from small, off-grid networks (mini grids) to the main electricity grid (*Accelerating SDG7 Achievement in the Time of COVID-19* 71–73; United Nations, 2020). It would also require the duplication of electrification by off-grid and on-grid sectors (see go.nature.com/3nmefxt).

Several different agencies analyse and report on the impact of investment decisions (see go.nature.com/3kymddz; K. Schumacher *et al. J. Sustain. Finance Invest.* **10**, 213–246; 2020), without indicating the accuracy of the perceived risk or how it relates to the real risks of energy markets. This results in inadequate quality assessment, undermining incentives to curtail the use of fossil fuels.

Investment strategies and data are crucial for evaluating how the energy system interacts with a broader economy to scale up decentralized renewables and achieve universal energy access. Decision-makers and researchers must work together towards a benchmark for decentralized energy investment that will accelerate the transition to renewables.

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