

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





Women at the Table is a growing, global Civil Society Organization based in Geneva, and is the first organization to focus on systems change by helping feminists gain influence in sectors that have key structural impact: technology, democracy and governance, the economy, and sustainability.

www.womenatthetable.net

INTRODUCTION

We work putting the technology and gender equality conversation on the mainstream global stage.

Artificial Intelligence technology and innovation will be key in gender transformation whether the technology moves us to the positive or the negative side of the gender justice equation.

Women at the Table founded in 2015 is the first organization to focus on systems change by helping women, girls, and marginalized people left out of the equation to gain influence in sectors that have key structural impact: technology, the economy, sustainability, democracy and governance. Since 2020 Women at the Table has directed its work advancing feminist systems change specifically using the prism of technology, innovation & AI to exercise leverage points in its four sectors of focus: technology, the economy, sustainability & democratic governance.

Instrumental in naming and shaping the notion of Feminist Artificial Intelligence, Women at the Table has been advancing both innovation and thought leadership to correct for real life biases and barriers that prevent women and girls in all their diversity from achieving full participation and equal enjoyment of rights. We connect the work of social science, feminist and interdisciplinary researchers with data scientists and machine learning experts who envision an inclusive and thriving future helping thinkers and scientists of all stripes to bring their disciplinary perspectives to policymakers at the solution table.

→ In 2019, Women at the Table conceived the <<u>A+> Alliance for Inclusive Algorithms</u>* now co-led with Tecnologico de Costa Rica. In 2020, <<u>A+></u> was nominated for a WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) Award for International and Regional Cooperation, and was a 2020 Fast Company World Changing Idea in AI & Data.

In late 2020, the Alliance was selected as leadership for one of the six **UN Women Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions- Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality** (TIGE) with whom we collaborated with partners in creating a 5 year strategic blueprint.

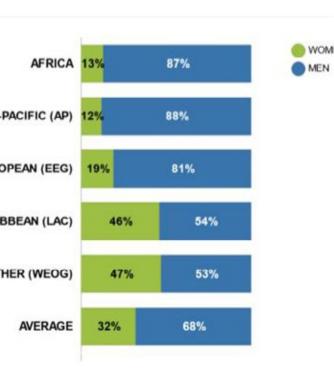
Finally, in 2021 two incubating projects came to full fruition:

→ The **g-app, Gender Gap Application** to measure and visualise gaps in and youth representation, participation & influence in international assemblies & conferences built with pro bono support of Thoughtworks' Social Impact, India and the law firm Debevoise & Plimpton.

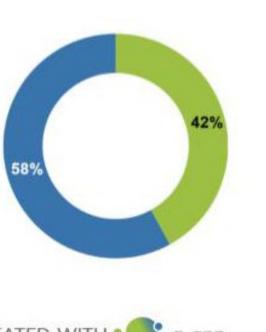
→ The **<AI & Equality Toolbox>** in collaboration with EPFL and UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) whose ultimate goal to bring an international university generation to understand the scientist's unique potential of social impact in the real world, bridging science and human rights policy to foster systemic resilience and more equal, just, robust democracies.

Finally, in 2021, the **<A+> Alliance was selected as as one of eighty projects for the Paris Peace Forum** as an example of a new global governance.

* Co-founded with Fundacion Ciudadania Inteligente 2019-2020



emblies set strategic direction and cr





G-app: Gender Gap Application

Who Gets to Speak? Who Gets Heard? Measuring representation, participation & influence

Who Gets to Speak on behalf of a changing world in crisis? At this critical moment in history, we see the stark divisions on who helps make the decisions that will affect generations to come.

Women at the Table, and Thoughtworks' Social Impact, India developed an open-source software - called the g-app for Gender Gap Application - designed to measure the active participation of women and youth in international conferences – capturing the proportion of time, the topics, the capacity and delegated authority women speak in the conference chamber.

LEARN MORE

COLLABORATORS





PILOT PARTNERS

Inter-Parliamentary Union, UNCTAD Commission on Science & Technology for Development (CSTD), Paris Peace Forum

IDEATION PARTNERS

Inter-Parliamentary Union, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), UN Women

Why is it important to be quantitative about 'Who gets to speak & be heard?'

Organisations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have been tracking gender composition as mandated by governing bodies over the past 5-10 years and have tried to move past counting the numbers of women to counting the influence of women and youth in the conference chamber.

The g-app was born out of the need to not only count numbers attending international events but to analyse who is speaking, with which authority, and on which topics. For example, the 2021 UNFCCC/COP-25 gender report showed 74% of speaking time in plenary was taken by men. Gender parity via attendance at a conference does not translate into who is speaking and who has influence.

We cannot have women speaking only on gender issues and gender panels. We need them to speak on climate, the economy, and other crucial issues affecting us all. With only one set of voices we will never have the breadth and depth of innovative solutions needed to solve our increasingly pressing issues.

Data matters! Being able to collect and visualise what the data means is more effective than saying "We need more of" or "We should do better". Instead, **g-app** enables tracking the progress of what creates successes, or failures, and ways to improve.

WATCH Watch the g-app lightning talk at MozFest

The g-app data is captured in order to provide concrete metrics. It is critical to highlight these figures in order to catalyse the outcome of more women and youth in leading positions corresponding to their proportion in the population.

→ g-app analyses and graphically represents data on the active participation, representation, and influence of women, youth, and regions. It measures: Who is at the Confrence? Do they have the power to speak? Or do they only speak on certain topics that are directly related to their demographics?

→ The g-app project is a crucial step to help us understand where we are and where we need to go in order to accomplish our goals and Institutionalise monitoring, evaluation and reporting on women's representation, participation and influence in multilateral and UN processes.

The persistent lack of progress in and the urgent need for improving the representation of women and youth in all aspects of UN processes is vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

→ The open-source (and free) g-app software was ideated in a Human Centered Design Workshop hosted by Women at the Table in 2019 with teams from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), UN AIDS, and UN Women. Throughout 2021, the software architecture and build was accomplished pro bono with Thoughtworks, a global NASDAQ traded software consultancy with their India Social Impact office, and legal work supplied by the law firm Debevoise & Plimpton.

→ g-app piloted with Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assemblies and UNCTAD's Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), premiering at the Paris Peace Forum 2021.

Our goal is to have the open source software used throughout the UN System and beyond to document and accomplish the aims of true representation, participation and influence in achieving the SDGs. A longitudinal research study for academics housed at University College Dublin is planned for the anonymised data.





The <A+> Alliance For Inclusive Algorithms

We are committed to the creation of a more inclusive future that enables robust, resilient & equal 21st century democracies.

Founded in 2019* The <A+> Alliance for Inclusive Algorithms is a global feminist coalition of technologists, activists and academics dedicated to the proposition that new algorithmic systems **must not embed already biased systems** into our collective futures. New models must reach **beyond mitigation of bias to actively correct for historic inequities.**

VISIT THE <A+> ALLIANCE

PARTNERS

TEC Tecnológico de Costa Rica

REGIONAL PARTNERS



Jordan Open Source Association



What is Feminist AI?

Pro-social AI, designed with inclusion at the core, **creating new opportunities & innovative correction of inequities.** Feminist AI focuses on bringing social programs in line with 21st century research and values, united in finding ways to make AI and emerging technologies gender-transformative: more effective, not merely more 'accurate' and 'efficient'.

Strategic Goals

With a strategy to **harness AI to deliver equal**ity outcomes, <A+> has a laser focus on the design of social and economic models of allocation/distribution now made more possible or more equitable through innovative use of data in Algorithmic Decision-Making Systems; systems that are being deployed worldwide without thorough examination of gendered impacts or gender transformative opportunities.

WATCH Video 'We are A+ Alliance'

Approach

<A+> Alliance leads global strategic advocacy, and thought leadership for feminist AI to actively correct for the real life biases and barriers that prevent women, girls and marginalized groups from achieving full participation and equal enjoyment of rights, advocating for a humanist feminist AI, inclusion, gender equality and women's rights. We accomplish this through:

→ **Research leadership** and excellence led by **feminist technologists and thinkers.**

→ **Leadership** in international, multilateral processes, and democratic governance.

→ Socialising **feminist AI in global civil society.**

→ Advocating on algorithmic accountability of governments and the private sector by using UN international legal human rights frameworks and declarations on women's rights.

- → Briefings for Member States, International Organizations, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures.
- → Original Research and position papers.

→ High level participation & inclusion of Accountability Principles and language in Working Groups: W7 Accountability; UN Guiding Principles for Tech & Gender; Gender Responsive Standards Initiatives.

→ Active leadership in UN Women's Generation Equality Action Coalition for Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality (2020-2025).

What we do

We connect the work and vision of data scientists and machine learning experts with social science, feminist and interdisciplinary researchers who dare to imagine and forge an inclusive and thriving future.

We build coalitions and host network events to catalyze new systems thinking, with the plan of expanding to include global civil society partners, Member States, international organizations, universities, grassroots activists and a governance structure to advance strategic goals to create change.

In 2020 the <A+> Alliance was a Fast Company 2020 World Changing Idea in AI & Data and nominated for a WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) Award for International & Regional Cooperation. In 2021, the <A+> Alliance was selected for the **Paris Peace Forum** as an example of a new global governance.





<AI & Equality> A Human Rights Toolbox

Our goal is to catalyse the new generation of researchers and computer/data scientists who are creating the algorithmic systems of the future, to understand human rights frameworks and how to use their technical knowledge for pro-social impact.

Aimed at data scientists but multidisciplinary in conception and delivery the toolbox is also used with social scientists and future policy makers to understand fundamentals of the technology they increasingly employ to implement policy goals.

OUR METHODOLOGY

COLLABORATORS









Universities have a critical role in teaching, sharing, and expanding discourse on human rights concepts into this burgeoning and increasingly fundamental field of study and practice. Integrating human rights values into computing technology can help educate the next generation of scientists and engineers to work for the public good, creating **tech that's aware of and in line with human values** rather than unwittingly creating risk and harm.

Emanating from a **2017 Women at the Table Roundtable on AI & Gender with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR) and EPFL, a **2019 EPFL workshop** (initially titled **AI & Gender: University Edition**) was conceived in collaboration with OHCHR to catalyze discussions on a human rights-based approach to AI with students and researchers. The first workshop was delivered in 2020 at EPFL in concert with the EPFL Digital Humanities Lab, and EPFL Equalities Office.

In 2021, an EPFL Data Science Masters Student devoted her (successfully defended 6.0) thesis to expanding the technical portions of the concept blending a basic human rights workshop developed in collaboration with OHCHR, with technical tools in order to directly and immediately see how human rights principles could, with critical analysis, be applied to code.

The **<AI & Equality Toolbox>** is aimed at data scientists but is multidisciplinary in its conception and delivery as social scientists and future policy makers need to understand fundamentals of the technology they increasingly employ to implement policy goals. Because the creation of technology to achieve policy must be a multidisciplinary effort strengthened by consultation, consensus, and diverse disciplinary perspectives, experts need to have the vocabulary and confidence to engage in conversation, critical analysis, and the collaboration necessary to focus on the aims and outcomes of any new technology product (for its intended as well as unintended consequences).

Goals

→ Bring an international university generation to understand the scientist's unique potential of social impact in the real world, bridging science and human rights policy to foster systemic resilience and more equal, just, robust democracies.

→ Aimed at Data Scientists but with its multidisciplinary approach and critical analytic methodology can be used by policy makers to employ vocabulary, critical analysis and conversation with technologists on these issues.

Results

→ Computer Science and Engineering Majors have critical understanding of gender, power, racial and other contextual/intersectional factors, and human rights dimensions of their work.

→ Multidisciplinary conversations on the concrete human rights aspects of technology development and deployment are begun between different disciplines.

→ University graduates in computer science and engineering fields are able to express their technical knowledge and analyze their field of study and innovations for deployment from a human rights/ intersectional/ public good perspective.

Method

→ Deliver <AI & Equality> A Human Rights Toolbox Workshop Modules for Computer or Data Science Majors with the express intention to expand workshop delivery in both the Global South and North – beginning with university contacts at EPFL, ETHZ and universities from the <A+> Alliance and f<a+i>r network in WEOG, Latin America, Africa, Asia.

→ Deliver multidisciplinary <AI & Equality> A Human Rights Toolbox Workshop Modules for Social Scientists who will be potential members of multidisciplinary public policy, Algorithmic Decision-Making (ADM) and AI teams of the future.

→ Upkeep rapidly moving science on the topic through extension of the <AI & Equality> Human Rights Toolbox. Content creation based on the Applied Research at Universities hosting Workshops. Curated expansion of resources and formation of a definitive <AI & Equality> Human Rights Toolbox library and tools to evolve into online modules.

→ Build a small, dedicated global multidisciplinary community of human rights-based oriented computer scientists with social scientists, legal scholars and policy makers to become champions of the human rights-based technology approach.





f<a+i>r Feminist AI Research Network

We believe it is necessary to contemplate new systems and new structures for the times ahead.

The f<a+i>r (feminist AI research) network is dedicated to finding ways to make Artificial Intelligence and related technologies more effective, inclusive and transformational, not only more 'efficient'.



READ THE FEMINIST AI PUBPUB

PARTNER

COLLABORATORS

◆ IDRC · CRDI Canadă 90+ technologists + social scientists. See **Global Directory**

Pilot Phase

In 2020, with the support of IDRC, the <A+> Alliance launched f<a+i>r, the Feminist AI Research network which gathered a global cohort of eminent data, machine learning and computer scientists side by side with social scientists, economists, and activists to discuss how to construct AI systems that bring social programs and policies fit for the 21st century. f<a+i>r's aim is to support the skill and imagination of Global South feminists in producing effective, innovative, interdisciplinary models that harness emerging technologies which correct for real life bias and barriers to women's rights, representation and equality.

Phase One

With longer term support of IDRC (2021-2024), the <A+> Alliance led by Women at the Table with new partner **Tecnológico de Costa Rica**, and **Regional Hub partners in Asia** (Chulalongkorn University/Bangkok), **Latin America & the Caribbean** (Tecnológico de Monterrey/México City) and **Middle East & North Africa** (Jordan Open Source Association / Amman) began incubating <u><Feminist AI: from Paper to Prototype</u> to Pilot> a call to create new algorithmic, and social science policy models that bring together siloed and divergent disciplines to collaborate on core public policy agendas in the Global South, including but going beyond solutions focussed primarily on gender based violence.

Methodology – Incubating,normalizing building & Networking Feminist AI

→ Building New Models: Research funding and mentorship over the 2021-2024 period will propel new feminist AI with 27 research papers funneling to 9 prototypes then 3 pilots. Each research cohort meets bi-weekly to share and build South-South knowledge. Each cycle has two specific Methodology & Evaluation papers.

→ Network Hubs: f<a+i>r uses a combination of public and private bi-monthly regional Hub meetings, and bi-monthly Global Meetings (in collaboration with sister network AI4D Gender & Inclusion Network Africa, funded by IDRC/ SIDA) to foster network building, South-South knowledge and extend and deepen boundary partnerships.

→ Promoting Feminist AI: <A+> has created the first online Global Directory to highlight and promote feminist AI doers and thinkers and their innovations from the primarily Global South f<a+i>r network.

Goal

f<a+i>r is meant to springboard from describing the well-established 'what' potential harms in algorithms and machine learning exist, to 'how' to course correct future harms. Urgently focused on 'how' new data, algorithms, models, policies + systems can be researched, then prototyped, and piloted for gender transformative change.

What is Feminist AI?

Pro-social Artificial Intelligence, **designed with inclusion at the core**, creating new opportunities and innovative correction of inequities. Feminist AI focuses on **bringing social programs in line with 21st century research and values, united in finding ways to make AI and emerging technologies gender-transformative** and – more effective, not merely more 'accurate' and 'efficient' as each country in the globe races to digitize their social systems.

MEET Our < Global Directory >

FORUM GÉNÉRATION ÉGALITÉ



Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality

MORE ABOUT THE TECH & INNOVATION ACTION COALITION



ACTION COALITION LEADERSHIP

UNICEF; International Telecommunications Union (ITU); Microsoft; Koç Holdings; Global Fund for Women; Social Builder, Digital Grassroots, Rockefeller Foundation; Salesforce; Governments of Chile, Finland, Rwanda. <A+> Alliance was incredibly proud to be selected as part of the plurilateral leadership team of Civil Society and International Organizations, Funders, Governments, and Private Sector for the period of 2021-2026.

Over 2021 as we prepared for the official launch of the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico and France, we worked with partners to craft a rich and thoughtful blueprint and action plan centered around 4 pillars of work:

→ Action One

By 2026, **reduce by half the gender digital divide across generations** by accelerating meaningful access to digital technologies and universal digital literacy.

→ Action Two

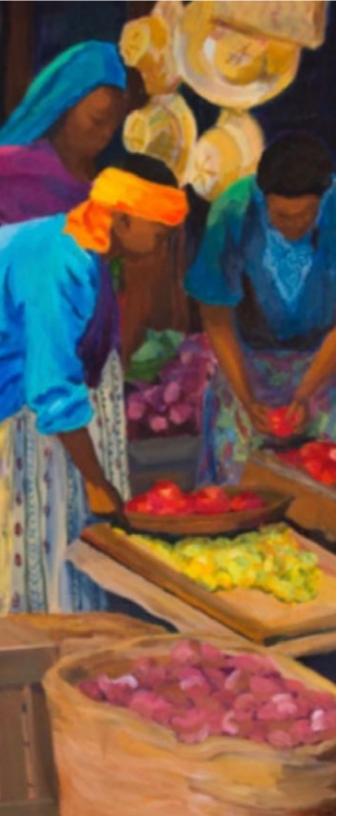
By 2026, **increase investments towards feminist tech-nology and innovation by 50%** to support women's leadership as innovators and better respond to women and girls' most pressing needs.

→ Action Three

By 2026, double the proportion of women working in technology and innovation by setting up **new networks** and benchmarks to transform innovation ecosystems.

→ Action Four

By 2026, a majority of countries and tech companies demonstrate accountability by **implementing policies and solutions against online and tech facilitated GBV and discrimination.**





The Tech We Need

A Women at the Table initiative: The <A+> Alliance Commitment to the Generation Equality Forum

Problem solving focused on how technology can measurably & positively impact social problems, improve quality of life, correct for historic exclusion, and address one or more of the SDGs.

READ MORE ABOUT THE TECH WE NEED



PARTNERS

Tecnológico de Monterrey

COLLABORATORS

Internet Lab, Brazil; Observatory of AI Social Impacts – UNTREF, Argentina; Data + Feminism Lab, MIT; Digital Humanities Lab, Emory University; Data-Pop Alliance; Center for Science, Technology + Society, Chulalongkorn University; Jordan Open Source Association. The community of Erizo Juan Santamaría, Alajuela, Costa Rica

The Problem, The Need

The international community has long recognized that there are entire communities being left behind. We do not know whether the technology being invented is serving the needs of those who have historically been most excluded from the conversation and the creation of tools: women and girls. The first step to fill this gap, quite simply, is to ask women and girls what they need.

The Pathway, The Process

1. Conversation, Problem Definition.

With mixed-methods methodology, as initial cohorts, we interview women community leaders and youth leaders living in informal settlements. Guided by an original survey the stakeholders express their needs on broad issues organized around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals so that the focus is on problem definition and solution, not 'technology'. Initially, we also interviewed three other stakeholder groups: government officials, international development partners, and technologists on what they perceive the needs to be of women and girls living in informal settlements.

For the first time we will have the ability to identify what is affirmed as women and girl's needs by the women and girls themselves and identify potential gaps with the actions of outside experts.

2. Problem Definition, Solution Design.

With the women community leaders and local university partners we mobilize multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder teams of social scientists and technologists to work collaboratively with the women and girls on the design and co-creation of needs-based, rights-based tech solutions. This includes Workshops, a Scientific Advisory Committee, mentors, and additional technical collaborators and community actors.

3. Solution Design, Prototype Pilot.

Women and Girl Community Leaders continue to lead, own, design, and maintain their solution to their problem. Increased influence and new decision-making platforms are foreseen for women as they turn their innovations and expertise into living tech, action and enterprise.

First site

Erizo Juan Santamaría, Alajuela, Costa Rica in partnership with Tecnológico de Costa Rica.

Goal

To create technology across the Global South that ensures no one is left behind, and that we all thrive, leveraging tech's full power to positively transform lives at scale. JOIN US!

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<A+> Alliance / Women at the Table **Tech Fellows**

In order to further research and our feminist point of view on algorithms we instituted the first <A+> Alliance / Women at the Table Tech Fellow Program.

MEET OUR FIRST TECH FELLOWS

PARTNERS



The 2021 Tech Fellows are visionary colleagues who will explore how machine learning and artificial intelligence can impact the lives of women and girls for good.



→ Abhishek Mandal

1st year PhD at University College Dublin, worked on the g-app with Thoughtworks, and produced a first rate primer on <u>Algorithmic Bias</u>. (He used his funding to buy critical computer equipment to advance his computer vision research in bias and has had several papers based on this research accepted to prestigious conferences.)



→ Sofia Kypraiou

Final year Masters student in Data Science at EPFL, wrote her Masters Thesis on the <AI & Equality> A Human Rights Toolbox creating a jupyter notebook of code that draws the line from code to human rights, validated the workshop's methodology, and created the website and resources during her time as a Fellow. She also supervised a Capstone Project for Smith College Statistical & Data Sciences which explored the COMPAS algorithm, a popular commercial algorithm used by judges and parole officers for scoring criminal defendant's likelihood of reoffending (recidivism). It has been shown, by ProPublica in 2016 that the algorithm is biased.





bsi. **Data Flex Standard**

Our Women at the Table CEO was thrilled to be the Technical Author of the BSI Inclusive Data Standard: Enabling the development of inclusive standards -Understanding the role of data and data analysis.

READ MORE ABOUT THE STANDARD

SEE THE PREVIEW

PARTNERS



ADVISORY GROUP

Ada Lovelace Institute, Association of Convenience Stores, Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation, Consumer and Public Interest Network, Data 2X, United Nations Foundation. Engineering Design Centre, University of Cambridge, Kingston University, Market Research Society, Open Data Institute, Internet Institute, Oxford University, Prospect Union, Women's Engineering Society.

Background

All standards are based on some form of data. The analogue and digital data we collect and/ or use, the models we build from that data and the standards we make have a profound impact on the lives of individual people and groups. Our understanding of linkages and impacts between humans, data, code and systems and the role of data and data analysis, helps us to create more inclusive standards that better reflect our shared values.

The first steps in this understanding begin with questions. Who defines the problem that the data is intended to solve? Who decides what data to collect and/or use? Who collects the data and how? Who analyses and questions the data? Who uses the data and for what purposes? Indeed, data is an integral part of almost every step of modern processes. Data is embedded everywhere in the new economy, and is the analogue foundation for protocols and guidelines, as well as newer machine learning models ranging from automated decision-making to neural networks. However, the data upon which this new economy is based is not neutral, nor does it stand alone as "reality". Much or most data is historical data which has the context of having been gathered on often small homogeneous subsets of the global population.

This historical data is incomplete, and socially and technically biased due to its incompleteness. Bias can occur either intentionally or unintentionally. Scarcity of useful representative data is a major issue, having been found to compromise the quality of health information available to women, for example, as well as the healthcare they receive. Critical healthcare provision and safety are made precarious by the consistent lack of representative data for minority group members.

Older, unrepresentative data forms the basis of many guidelines that continue to drive data decisions, from metabolic rate, airplane cockpit design safety and radiology protocols to newer, larger, yet also unrepresentative benchmark data used in the accelerating world of algorithmic decision-making and artificial intelligence (AI). These decisions range from low to high-risk applications with the ability to harm, from transport and trade, to finance, health, medicine and criminal justice. Data works at a velocity and scale in this century that touches on all corners of modern life. Part of AI's utility is in the machine's ability to perceive patterns in data, and then derive a set of rules from those patterns.

However if the original data has excluded all but a small generally homogenous (e.g. young, white, male, educated, heterosexual) dataset, the AI perceives that data to be the only reality that exists (because it is the only reality the machine has been exposed to and trained on). This exclusion at scale has dangerous consequences for the entire population. Of great

concern for high-risk applications, it should also be noted that low risk applications also can have profound social impact on the quality of life and well-being of individuals, beginning with forms of access to information from targeted advertisements to search algorithms to financial access. Data, even if "debiased", behaves differently in different machine learning models, and identical machine learning models behave differently from one another in real world situations "in the wild". Debiased data is also interpreted differently in different human decision-making processes. This is not exclusive to machines. Who or what does the debiasing influences the outcome of any such exercise.

The opportunity

With the use of inclusive data in standards development, there is an opportunity to not only mitigate, but correct for historic inequities buried in previous data. The opportunity, as new systems proliferate and are designed, is to revisit old assumptions and conceive of standards, datasets and data models with inclusion, efficacy and equity at the core, and to expand mono-notions of good practice to ways of making the data life cycle, including the presentation of data, and interpretation of data at the point of decision and its utility, more effective, inclusive and transformational, including the way we represent and share standards.



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