

Fortnightly links: Middle East, religion in development, East Africa, and more...

By Camilla Burkot and Terence Wood
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Starting in the Middle East, for the time being the Iran deal [appears to be a done deal](#). There's an interesting discussion on the US domestic politics of this outcome [here](#).

Of course, analysis on Iran has largely been overshadowed in recent days by the Syrian refugee crisis. Whether you measure it in quantitative or qualitative terms, the exodus is staggering. Hans Rosling [explains](#) the quantities of Syrian refugee flows (killer fact: more than half of Syria's pre-conflict population are either internally displaced or living as refugees in other countries). In doing so, he also highlights the paradoxes and sheer insufficiency of European policy towards Syrian refugees. Along similar lines, Syrian-American Lina Sergie Attar despondently [asks](#): 'When America-and the world-have abandoned [Syria], what more can we do now but catalogue our losses?'

Also overshadowed by Syria's domination of the headlines is the continuing conflict in the region's poorest country: Yemen. As Save the Children UK's Mark Kaye [notes](#), some 21 million are in need of aid. The fact that Somalia has emerged as one of the [primary destinations for refugees](#) fleeing Yemen (including native Yemenis as well as those of [Somali and other origins](#)) speaks volumes about the level of violence and desperation now facing the country.

Bruce Wydick has an [interesting blog post](#) on what secular and religious development practitioners can learn from each other. Interesting: although, I [Terence] strongly disagree with his claim that the religious have something to teach the secular about taking a more holistic view of development (religious people may indeed have holistic views of what development means; but, then again, so do plenty of non-religious people I know). Indeed, although it's not quite development, if you feel like devoting an hour of your weekend to a very thoughtful discussion of the history of meaningful world views held by agnostics and humanists, have a watch/listen [here](#).

Wydick also has an interesting [blog post](#) from a study he did on the much-maligned TOMS shoes ('buy one pair and we'll send another to someone in a developing country'). The findings are not necessarily what you'd expect.

In Burundi, embattled President Pierre Nkurunziza has succeeded in his controversial quest for a third term in office. Writing for *Foreign Policy*, Cara Jones and Orion Donovan-Smith

[report](#) that the Nkurunziza administration's decision to respond to threats by Western governments of suspending foreign aid — which makes up about half of Burundi's budget — by aligning with Russia and China should be (yet another) wake-up call for how the West engages with Africa.

Finally, on a somewhat lighter note, a [popular TV program](#) that has aired for the last five years in Tanzania features an unlikely cast of reality stars: female farmers. The producers of *Female Food Heroes* argue that while media coverage cannot achieve gender equality, such initiatives can help promote policy change by nudging popular attitudes in the right direction.

About the author/s

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