

Weekend links: Iran deal, catalytic aid, Chinese well-being, solar power, health subsidies, and the value of celebrities

by Camilla Burkot and Terence Wood

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It's been a massive week for foreign policy. While a Grexit appears to have been precluded (for the time being, at least) by Greece's acceptance of [tough austerity measures](#), a [nuclear deal](#) (or, more properly, a 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action') between the US, Iran, and six other nations was finally reached in Vienna. However, as The New Yorker's Robin Wright [explains](#), this is by no means the end of the story — having shaken on the deal, American and Iranian diplomats now face the unenviable task of placating their compatriots.

Meanwhile, the locus of the aid and development world this week has been Addis Ababa and the [3rd International Conference on Financing for Development](#). A much hyped theme going into the conference was the promise of greater private sector and other sources of funding in development; Paddy Carter offers a [break down](#) of the rhetoric and the reality behind the notion of 'catalytic aid'.

A joint [Gallup-Healthways International poll](#) shows that the benefits of increased investment in healthcare in China have accrued unevenly. Though fewer Chinese overall are considered be 'suffering' in physical well-being as compared to the global population — 5% versus 11%, a finding which is thought to be linked with the rapid reduction in poverty across China — income, age, and geographic location all exert a notable influence on physical well-being within China. Researchers highlight improved financial, social, and community well-being as keys to increasing physical well-being.

On Project Syndicate, ODI Director Kevin Watkins [notes](#) the shocking statistic that Africans who are unconnected to national electricity grids (who make up about two-thirds of the region's population) pay the equivalent of about \$10 per kilowatt-hour for energy in the form of charcoal, batteries, candles and kerosene. By contrast, the average American pays just 15 cents. Watkins suggests that solar and other renewable sources offer an effective solution to the barriers of cost and access to energy on the continent, provided that mechanisms to address up-front costs and regulatory challenges can be appropriately devised.

Targeted subsidies in relation to essential health products, such as bed nets and water treatments, were put under the microscope in a new NBER Working Paper

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authored by members of the [J-PAL](#) team [gated [pdf](#); ungated pdf [here](#)]. Evidence from audits of subsidised bed nets for pregnant women in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda suggests that concerns that ‘agency problems’ (in effect: unscrupulous, incompetent, or lazy health workers) may undermine the effectiveness of such subsidies are mostly unfounded: when a subsidy is made available, roughly 80% of eligible persons received the subsidy, very rarely were they asked to pay bribes, and few ineligible persons benefitted from the subsidy.

Finally, The Guardian’s Secret Aid Worker [regales readers](#) with anecdotes about celebrity ambassadors visiting ‘the field’ that are sometimes entertaining and sometimes cringe-inducing, but also occasionally redeeming. And on a more serious but related note, Tiny Spark’s Amy Costello asks ‘how much is a celebrity worth?’, on a [podcast](#) [19 mins] featuring an interview with journalist Kenneth Vogel, who [investigated fees](#) paid by nonprofits to have one of the Clintons (Bill, Hillary, and Chelsea) speak at fundraising events. What little data there is available suggests the answer is ‘not much’.

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Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/weekend-links-iran-deal-catalytic-aid-chinese-well-being-solar-power-health-subsidies-and-the-value-of-celebrities/>