

# Weekend links: TED talks, mobile coverage, NGOs in conflict, lotteries as HIV prevention, South Sudan, and more

By Camilla Burkot and Terence Wood  
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TED talks are a popular forum for sharing ideas on a plethora of topics. But what impact might they actually have? A new [analysis](#) [gated; ungated pre-print excerpt [here](#)] of TED talks focused on international development finds that they are good for disseminating ideas, but are unlikely to spark social change. The article forms part of a [special issue](#) of *Communication Theory* on communication for development (C4D) and social change.

Increasing access to telecommunications and the Internet is often lauded as a way of supporting development, whether through e-banking, enhancing access to education, or linking health workers with patients. This Guardian [photo essay](#), which illustrates what is actually involved in bringing mobile coverage to a remote area of the DRC, shows that (like so many aspects of development) increasing connectivity is often much easier said than done.

[‘Does it pay for US-based NGOs to go to war?’](#) This article in the journal *Development and Change* tests the possibility that NGOs might pragmatically decide to locate operations in conflict zones, on the logic that doing so will result in enhanced funding opportunities. Somewhat surprisingly, it doesn’t appear that engaging where the US has active military operations (Iraq and Afghanistan, in this retrospective study) offers a financial dividend to US-based NGOs, whether from official US sources or private donations [ungated working paper pdf [here](#)].

Development agencies, NGOs and academics spend much of their time producing data, analyses, and tools with the intention that they will be used by policymakers in developing countries. But are they? A new [report](#) [pdf] on AidData presents findings from a survey of nearly 7,000 developing country leaders to find out what factors make them more or less responsive to external assessments of governance and policy analysis in their countries.

Recent [research](#) from the World Bank tested the use of cash lotteries to incentivise HIV risk reduction in Lesotho. Using a randomised controlled trial design, the researchers report a 21.4% reduction in HIV incidence in the intervention group. Even better, those participants who were classified as ‘risk-loving’ responded more strongly to the intervention than the

‘risk-averse’. But though the study offers some intriguing psychological insights, it’s difficult to see how such an intervention might be taken to scale — and whether the effects would still hold if it was.

In [last week’s weekend links](#), we highlighted the volatile political situation in Burundi. Over the last 48 hours, a number of developments have unfolded, including a possible coup d’etat. On Wednesday, Burundi’s chief of army, Godefroid Niyombare, [announced](#) he was dismissing President Nkurunziza (who was attending a meeting in Tanzania). Whether this amounted to a [coup attempt](#), or whether a coup actually took place, remains [unclear](#).

In other developments in sub-Saharan Africa, there are [accounts](#) of intensifying fighting in the world’s youngest state, South Sudan. Ahead of a briefing on the situation to the Security Council, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) this week [reported](#) that some 119,000 internally displaced persons have sought protection.

Yet amid the clearly escalating need, South Sudan has just [passed](#) the NGOs Bill, which (among other provisions) limits the number of foreigners that aid agencies will be permitted to employ: 20% of total staff. This may be viewed as an improvement from the (swiftly reversed) [directive](#) issued last September, which sought to ban all foreign aid workers — but the new bill still raises serious concerns about the capacity of aid agencies in country to deliver vital relief in conflict-afflicted areas.

## About the author/s

### Camilla Burkot

Camilla Burkot was a Research Officer at the Development Policy Centre, and Editor of the Devpolicy Blog, from 2015 to 2017. She has a background in social anthropology and holds a Master of Public Health from Columbia University, and has field experience in Eastern and Southern Africa, and PNG. She now works for the Burnet Institute.

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Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/weekend-links-ted-talks-mobile-coverage-ngos-in-conflict-lotteries-as-hiv-prevention-south-sudan-and-more/>

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