

Fortnightly links: development unicorns, sweatshops, Afghan aid, cobalt, and more

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Stories of failed development innovations are like unicorns -- rare but welcome. An example can be found in [this summary](#), or access the full article in the open-access journal *Development Engineering* [here](#). The innovation in question was the use of RFID technology in Sri Lankan microenterprises.

This at times endearing, at times wrenching [long read](#) from *The New York Times* offers some insights into the lives of young women migrants recruited to work in Bangalore factories. The article is part of a broader series about barriers to women's entry to the workforce in India.

On a related topic: some might argue that we didn't need an RCT to tell us that sweatshops are awful places to work, but Chris Blattman and Stefan Dercon's latest paper ([paper](#), [Vox article](#), [blog](#)) does an impressive job of capturing the health impact of sweatshops on their Ethiopian workers. Of course, as Paul Krugman [pointed out](#) long ago, "bad jobs at bad wages are better than no jobs at all". But as Blattman and Dercon's paper also shows, at least in some instances small grants may help workers find other, better types of employment.

Some of his arguments are debatable, but Andrew Markus also [provides some good reasons](#) to think that the poll that found that one in two Australians favour a ban on Muslim immigration ought not be treated as the final word on the matter.

Devpolicy Visiting Fellow, and former deputy minister for youth in Afghanistan, Nemat Bizhan, offers some [informed commentary](#) in Project Syndicate on Afghanistan's way forward and aid's potential role in it.

This [op-ed](#) from the president of Oxfam America argues the need for a 'new approach to foreign aid', arguing that while aid is not solely responsible for huge strides in human development in recent years, "it has certainly meant that more people have been able to make more progress faster".

Lastly, Todd Frankel [reports](#) in *The Washington Post* about the supply chain for cobalt which links an estimated 100,000 unregulated miners (some of them children), to a Chinese company, to the batteries that power smartphones, laptops and other electronic devices all over the world.