

Weekend links: UK & Australian aid, development is WEIRD, Burundi, garbage coding, FGC, and more

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By the time this post is published, the polls will have closed in Britain. Despite the UK enshrining the 0.7% of GNI commitment in law in March, foreign aid was regarded by some -- including UKIP leader Nigel Farage -- to be a fair target in pre-election campaigning. As David Hudson [writes](#), Farage's position isn't a fringe view, but rather taps into deeper public disquiet about the uses to which aid funds are put, and indicates the need for aid advocates to do a better job of explaining aid.

On this side of the globe, aid effectiveness and cuts to the Australian aid budget were highlighted on this week's [episode](#) [clips and transcript] of current affairs program Q&A, ahead of the release of the 2015-16 Federal Budget. As well as pressing Environment Minister Greg Hunt on the Coalition's cuts, philosopher Peter Singer elaborated on the concept of 'effective altruism'. (By the way, if you want to learn more about what the budget will mean for Australian aid, join Devpolicy's 2015 aid budget breakfast via [livestream](#) from 9am AEST on Wednesday 13 May).

Also related to aid effectiveness, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) recently launched [Service Info](#), an online platform that aims to help Syrian refugees in Lebanon to rate the providers of services to refugees (as [Chris Blattman](#) put it: 'Yelp for refugees'). The idea of getting beneficiaries to rate aid services as a way of improving quality and effectiveness has been [batted around](#) in the development blogosphere for a while, so no doubt many will be keeping a keen eye on how Service Info fares.

It's also been a bumper week when it comes to putting development practitioners and journalists under the microscope. William Easterly's *The Tyranny of Experts* failed to convince Tony Barclay, who [critiqued](#) [paywalled] Easterly's 'sweeping and shallow generalisations' of development practitioners. IRIN News seemed to be on the same page as Easterly, though, describing humanitarians as overwhelmingly [WEIRD](#) (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) -- which can be highly problematic when the people they are trying to help do not share these attributes. And Jonathan Katz offered some advice about ['How Not to Report on an Earthquake'](#), reflecting on his experiences following the Haiti 2010 earthquake.

Though its political climate has been growing increasingly tense for nearly a year, the East African country of Burundi is now in [turmoil](#) ahead of elections in which President Pierre Nkurunziza will seek a third term -- in direct violation of Burundi's constitution. As of now, an estimated [40,000](#) Burundians have poured across the borders, mainly into Rwanda, and around a dozen have been killed in clashes in Bujumbura. Somewhat predictably, Nkurunziza is now arguing that the ['only solution'](#) to the violence is his continued 'leadership'.

In health news, it will come as no surprise to most who have worked with developing country health systems that we (still) have [no idea](#) what is killing people. While inaccurate death records and 'garbage coding' are more common in many developing countries, Australia and other developed nations are not immune. In practice this means that our disease priorities, and thus funding priorities, may be seriously distorted.

An [article](#) [paywalled; ungated PDF version [here](#)] published in *The Journal of Development Studies* examines the health impacts as well as the social and cultural implications of female genital cutting (FGC; also called female genital mutilation, or FGM) in 13 African countries.

How did Sri Lanka manage to drop unemployment from over 14% to 4% in 20 years? A new [case study](#) from ODI highlights a number of lessons learned, including smart policy-making and a strong role for government, but also notes that emigration and war-related employment also factored in.

Last but certainly not least, if an inspiring podcast is what you're after this weekend, The Moth Radio Hour's

recent development-themed special is a can't-miss, featuring poignant [stories](#) about food security, education, HIV/AIDS and fishing from Zimbabwe, Uganda, South Africa and Indonesia.