Weekend reading and listening: migrants, beyond aid, toward data, malaria, Rojava revolution, and oil cronyism

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Date: May 1, 2015

Along with the devastating earthquake in Nepal, the plight of migrants and refugees across the world was difficult to ignore this week. Sarah Stillman of the *New Yorker* highlights an under-reported and disturbing practice: migrants, especially children and young people, being kidnapped and held for ransom. As US border security tightened, an activist notes, 'the more people can charge, [and] the more dangerous the trip becomes'.

This is, of course, a near perfect analogy to what is happening in the Mediterranean. On the Crooked Timber blog, Chris Bertram finds the EU's ten-point plan on migration to be largely 'irrelevant to events'. Despite their obligations to provide sanctuary under the Refugee Convention, sanctions and deterrents pushed by (largely northern) European countries have created a situation in which migrants are left with virtually no alternatives to unscrupulous people smugglers charging extortionate prices.

Though the economic impact of migration has been hotly discussed in the run up to the UK election, this recent NBER Working Paper [gated; ungated PDF of an earlier version here] finds that (in the US context at least) native-born workers actually benefit significantly from the arrival of immigrants, via job creation and increased wages in the non-traded services sector.

Also in response to the Mediterranean crisis, Marta Foresti makes the case that the development community should start seriously engaging with migration -- in fact we must do so, if we are serious about moving 'beyond aid'.

Also on the subject of beyond aid, Owen Barder's essay on 'the aid ring fence' highlights three major challenges for development -- fragile states, inequality in middle income countries, and global and transboundary problems -- and identifies four implications for development policy. The challenge, of course, will be finding a way to actually implement the 'new mind-sets' and consensus he is advocating for.

The notion of 'big data' and data quality also figure prominently in discussions on how to improve aid and development effectiveness. A recently released report from ODI on 'the data revolution' argues that quality data is the key not only to measuring development progress, but also to sparking it.

Global health activists were hard-pressed to find much to celebrate this World Malaria Day (April 25), with clinical trials of the most advanced malaria vaccine (RTS,S) showing disappointing results. However, others have chosen to interpret these findings as a 'glass half full' situation, arguing that though the vaccine may not (yet) be of public health significance, it is still a step in the right direction. And while drug resistance remains a serious threat, some new research pointed to possible mechanisms for delaying the spread of resistance.

In western Kurdistan (northern Syria), militias including the all-female YPJ are playing an important role in the fight against ISIS. Though whether the 'Rojava revolution' is giving rise to a socialist enclave may be debated, there is little doubt that these women occupy a unique niche within the Kurdish community and the greater Middle East.

Finally, PRI reports [article and podcast] on the ascendancy of Folorunsho Alakija to the position of 'richest black woman in the world' in December on the basis of her oil wealth. Though she is a singular figure, Alakija's story can be taken as emblematic of the personal connections -- and sheer luck -- required to get ahead in Nigeria.