

**TWAS NEWSLETTER**

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# IN THE NEWS

## Girl-focused data is critical for Africa

The United Nations has made the gathering of data on girls across the world the focus of 2017.

Marking the International Day of the Girl Child, the U.N. issued a call for action for increased investment in collecting and analysing data that's focused on and relevant to girls.

Robust and reliable data collected on a regular basis is essential for policymaking. For Africa, girl-focused and girl-relevant data is a critical tool for identifying the challenges that continue to disadvantage girls. This will enable African politicians, lawmakers and civil society to better understand the barriers that confront girls and design policies and services to respond to their specific needs.

**The Conversation:**  
[www.bit.do/GirlData](http://www.bit.do/GirlData)

## Desalination plants – risky investments?

India, China and the Middle East are hot markets for desalination plants. But efforts in Australia to increase capacity are a cautionary tale of growing the sector too big, too fast. Australia's stranded desalination plants, coupled with huge electrical power demands, have put the world's desalination sector on the defensive, especially for developers of big and expensive seawater plants. About 150 such plants, producing the bulk of desalination capacity, operate around the world. The greatest density of seawater plants is in the Caribbean and the Arabian Gulf states.

**Circle of Blue:**  
[www.bit.do/Desalination](http://www.bit.do/Desalination)

## Robots on farms are coming of age

From tracking cattle and measuring crop health to counting yields and dispensing agro-chemicals, robotics technologies promise solutions to pressing farm labour shortages,

yield and productivity issues as well as environmental concerns.

Because leaps forward in computing power have made real-time data gathering and analysis possible, farmers could now be able to make critical decisions that address the issues of an individual plant, tree or animal, rather than having to apply decisions across a whole farm or orchard.

**SciDevNet:**  
[www.bit.do/FarmRobots](http://www.bit.do/FarmRobots)

## Excitement builds for new HIV vaccine

Glenda Gray, head of South Africa's Medical Research Council, leads the first large study of an HIV vaccine's effectiveness since 2009. It's expected to end the 33-year-long wait, since 1983, to develop an effective vaccine.

The current study is based on a vaccine used in a trial in Thailand in 2009. The success rate of that vaccine was 30%. The new vaccine has been made stronger so that its effects last longer. Results from South Africa are expected in four years.

**Down to Earth:**  
[www.bit.do/HIV-Vaccine](http://www.bit.do/HIV-Vaccine)

## Midwives on motorbikes aid mothers in Kenya

International development agencies believe that providing funding for motorbikes as part of the Rural Transport Network scheme, rates of maternal mortality in Isiolo County, Kenya, will improve.

According to the World Health Organisation, more than 6,300 women died in childbirth last year in Kenya, one of the highest rates in East Africa. Deep in Kenya's interior, health facilities are sparse, with some up to 100 kilometres from the communities they serve. For pregnant women, reaching a centre can be perilous, particularly when dirt roads flood and bridges become submerged.

**The Guardian:**  
[www.bit.do/MidwivesKenya](http://www.bit.do/MidwivesKenya)