

IHP News 867: AI summary & key reads of the week

Introduction: "Let's Get on Our Horses"

The newsletter opens by framing 2026 as the Chinese "**Year of the Fire Horse**," symbolising optimism and the need for action following a period of transformation. Key focus areas include the **39th African Union (AU) summit**, where the principle of regional leadership and global support for health sovereignty took centre stage. In Geneva, the **WHO Director-General (DG) race** has effectively begun, with rumours circulating about a "unicorn" candidate who possesses both political navigation skills and technical discipline. Concurrently, the **Munich Security Conference** highlighted the rising threat of **AI misuse** in bio-security and a concerning trend where European nations are following the US in making deep cuts to global health investments. Notable publications highlighted include **Seye Abimbola's** work on "the evidence of things not seen" and new frontiers in health policy and systems research.

Featured Article: WHO Process for Global Health Architecture Reform

Daniel López Acuña examines the strategic reform of the **Global Health Architecture (GHA)**. The WHO Executive Board recently approved a decision for the Director-General to design an **inclusive, Member State-led process** to support this transformation, which will be considered at the 79th World Health Assembly. This initiative arises amidst a proliferation of reform proposals from various global actors. For the WHO's proposal to be successful, it must be **credible, objective, and binding**, leading to a multilateral consensus that makes the global health system more efficient and effective.

Highlights of the Week

African Union Summit & Health

Discussions at the AU summit emphasised **health security sovereignty**, moving away from foreign aid toward self-sufficient, homegrown systems. A major commitment was made to produce **60% of Africa's health products locally by 2040** via the launch of **ACHIEVE Africa** and the African Pooled Procurement Mechanism. Leaders also called for the deployment of **two million community health workers (CHWs) by 2030**, noting that every \$1 invested yields up to \$19 in economic returns. Furthermore, there is an urgent call for 24 more countries to ratify the **African Medicines Agency (AMA) treaty** to harmonise continental regulations. UN Secretary-General Guterres highlighted the injustice of the current financial system, noting that Africa loses more to debt servicing than it receives in aid.

Global Fund Board Meeting

The Board welcomed an **Eighth Replenishment total of \$12.64 billion**, though France's decision to cut its funding by **58%** sent shockwaves through the partnership. Strategic shifts are being implemented to focus resources on the **poorest countries with the heaviest disease burdens** and to support their transition toward self-reliance. Despite the funding, observers warn that shrinking aid and "HIV exceptionalism" ending may risk shifting burdens onto African countries and weakening community-led responses.

Munich Security Conference (MSC)

The MSC focused heavily on "**AI-enabled threats**," with CEPI warning that rapid progression in AI could allow for the creation of **synthetic pathogens**. A report from the **ONE Campaign** highlighted a "security paradox": OECD heavyweights now spend **seven times more on defense than on development**, which critics argue undermines long-term global stability. While development-related panels were present, they often remained in "silos," failing to integrate fully into the broader security dialogue.

Reform & Reimagining of Global Health

David Clarke argues that the current reform debate lacks a foundation in "**state capacity**"; if countries cannot institutionally spend the budgets they have, sovereignty remains rhetorical. Other analysts note that while there is consensus on *what* needs to change, there is a lack of "**decision-making courage**" regarding *how* to implement these transitions and who should be held accountable if they fail. The divide is increasingly defined by **Northern anxiety vs. Southern agency**.

PABS Negotiations & PPPR

The latest round of **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS)** negotiations revealed a "trust deficit" between the Global North and South. The central conflict remains whether benefit sharing should be **mandatory or voluntary**. Public health experts are also concerned about **US bilateral deals** to exchange pathogen data for aid, which may undermine the multilateral system. CEPI launched its "**CEPI 3.0**" strategy, seeking \$2.5 billion to develop vaccines for known and emerging threats within 100 days.

US Bilateral Health Agreements & US Global Health Strategy

Despite the Trump administration's proposed cuts, the **US Congress** passed legislation that preserves core global health investments, indicating enduring bipartisan support. However, the bill codifies the "**America First Global Health Strategy**," shifting authority toward the Department of State and requiring clear benchmarks for country ownership. Critics argue that the strategy's lack of focus on **HIV prevention** and its pressure on countries to wind down **Cuban medical missions** could reverse years of progress.

More on Global Health Governance & Funding/Financing

The race for the next **WHO Director-General** is intensifying, with at least 12 rumoured candidates. The "ideal" profile is a **technocrat/reformer** who can navigate geopolitical divides and regain public confidence. Meanwhile, UN agencies in Geneva are using "**agenda-keeping**" strategies—reframing health as a security emergency—to maintain relevance amidst major financial strain.

Debt Reform & Justice

Lower-income country **debt payments have hit their highest level since 1990**, reaching 19.2% of government revenue in 2025. This crisis is exacerbated by **vulture funds** suing countries like Ethiopia after breakdowns in relief negotiations.

More on the Aid Cuts & Transition

UK aid cuts are now projected to be even deeper than those of the US, with a planned **34% reduction by 2027** to fund increased military spending. The **Gates Foundation** is currently managing internal fallout and public "sullied" association following released details of Bill Gates' interactions with **Jeffrey Epstein**.

Trump 2.0

The administration has expanded the **Mexico City Policy** ("Global Gag Rule"), and the **CDC** currently lacks a Senate-confirmed director. Staff at the **NIAID** have reportedly been instructed to scrub terms like "**biodefense**" and "**pandemic preparedness**" from official websites as research priorities shift.

SRHR

A WHO report revealed that **60% of maternal deaths** occur in settings affected by conflict or institutional fragility. The maternal mortality ratio in conflict zones is **five times higher** than in stable countries. Additionally, sharp aid cuts from the US and UK are putting global efforts to eliminate **female genital mutilation (FGM)** at risk.

Human Resources for Health

Experts argue that **training without jobs is a waste of aid**, noting that many countries have a "paradoxical surplus" of unemployed health workers because they lack the **fiscal space** to hire them. Efforts are underway in sub-Saharan Africa to eliminate "**ghost workers**" and reinvest those funds into frontline CHWs.

Social Determinants of Health

The TB epidemic continues to thrive due to a **lack of political resolve** to invest in social protection. A rights-based approach is needed to provide benefits to every TB-vulnerable household.

Conflict/War/Genocide & Health

A *Lancet* study indicates that the **Gaza death toll** in the early part of the conflict was substantially higher than official reports, with violent deaths exceeding initial figures. There are calls to **re-examine famine classification thresholds**, as current IPC mortality-based systems may mask the early effects of starvation in urbanised populations.

Planetary Health

The Trump administration is reportedly pressuring nations to withdraw a **UN climate proposal** led by Vanuatu, arguing that reparations for climate damage pose a "major threat to U.S. industry".

AI & Health

Guidelines are being proposed to **stop using AI imagery** in global health communications to protect the dignity of vulnerable populations. Instead, organisations are encouraged to commission **local image makers** to reimagine power dynamics.

Access to Medicines, Vaccines & Other Health Technologies

The US is rumoured to be exploring "**AmeriQual**," a potential alternative to the WHO prequalification process, which could cause massive disruption to global procurement systems. In West Africa, Guinea-Bissau halted a **US-funded vaccine study** aiming to link hepatitis B vaccines to autism, which the WHO labelled as unethical.

Key Publications, Issues & Reports

The field of **HPSR** is identifying "new frontiers," including more domestic financing and engagement with new health development actors. The *Lancet Global Health* March issue highlights the "**tuberculogenic environment**"—the upstream social and economic factors that sustain the TB pandemic.

Miscellaneous

The global health community mourns the passing of **David Legge**, a methodical genius and leader of the **People's Health Movement**. Finally, UN human rights experts have demanded accountability following the "Epstein Files," which reveal a possible **global criminal enterprise** involving the systematic exploitation of women and girls.

Some key reads of the week

Featured Article

1. **Daniel López Acuña** - [The WHO process for supporting the reform of the global health architecture](#) (IHP). This article outlines the strategic importance of the WHO's Member State-led process for global health reform.

African Union Summit & Health

2. **Africa CDC** - [Presidential Declaration on Advancing Local Manufacturing](#). African leaders commit to local manufacturing of 60% of health products by 2040.

Global Fund Board Meeting

4. **Global Fund** - [Global Fund Board Welcomes Final Eighth Replenishment Outcome](#). The partnership confirms \$12.64 billion for the next cycle with a focus on self-reliance.
5. **Aidspace** - [New issue on the last GF Board meeting \(GFO\)](#). This issue warns that shrinking aid risks shifting burdens onto African countries and weakening community responses.

Munich Security Conference

6. **The Telegraph** - [AI could be used to trigger a new pandemic](#). Intelligence chiefs are warned that AI progression makes the creation of synthetic pathogens a rising threat.
7. **ONE Campaign** - [The Security Paradox: More Defense, Less Stability?](#). A report analyzing how prioritizing military spending over development undermines global stability.

Reform & Reimagining of Global Health

8. **David Clarke** - [The Architecture Debate Is Missing Its Foundation](#) (**Governance Rx**). **Must-read** arguing that the global health reform debate is a state capacity problem rather than just a revenue issue.
9. **Emilie Sabine Koum Besson** - [From Big Names to Hard Choices](#). **Must-read** on the need for decision-making courage to move from prestigious consensus to politically costly implementation.

PABS Negotiations & PPPR

10. **Suerie Moon** - [Wide gaps on pandemic treaty annex cast doubt on May deadline](#) (**Geneva Solutions**). Analysis of the fundamental divide between mandatory and voluntary benefit sharing.
11. **P. Patnaik** - [In A Bind: G6+ Vs Developing Countries](#) (**Geneva Health Files**). An interrogation of the "trust deficit" and technical flashpoints in the latest pathogen-sharing talks.
12. **Shashika Bandara et al.** - [WHO Pandemic Agreement is only the beginning](#) (**BMJ**). **Must-read** on translating the global agreement into meaningful national policies and tackling equity challenges.

US Bilateral Health Agreements & Strategy

13. **J. Ratevosian** - [What \\$50 Billion for U.S. Foreign Affairs Changes for Global Health](#) (**Think Global Health**). **Must-read** explaining how new legislation consolidates authority in the State Department and shifts away from HIV exceptionalism.

Global Health Governance & Financing

15. **Health Policy Watch** - [Want to Become the Next WHO Director-General?](#). **Must-read** analysis of the 12 rumored candidates for the upcoming "unicorn" DG race.
16. **D. Sridhar** - [Trump has pulled the US out of the WHO – here's why that's sheer hypocrisy](#) (**Guardian**). Argues that the U.S. remains dependent on the WHO for global health intelligence despite public rhetoric.

Debt Reform & Justice

17. **Debt Justice** - [Lower-income country debt payments hit highest level since 1990](#). Highlights how debt payments have hit a 35-year high, consuming 19.2% of government revenue.

Aid Cuts & Transition

18. **I. Mitchell et al.** - [UK Aid Cuts Now Deeper than the US](#) (**CGD**). Comparison showing that UK aid cuts are projected to outstrip those of the U.S. administration.
19. **Mark Suzman** - [Gates Foundation 'sullied' by Epstein link](#) (**FT**). Reports on internal fallout following the disclosure of correspondence between foundation staff and Jeffrey Epstein.

Trump 2.0

20. **KFF** - [The Mexico City Policy: An explainer](#). A critical resource for understanding the administration's expanded "Promoting Human Flourishing" policy.

SRHR

21. **WHO** - [Conflict and instability make pregnancy more dangerous](#). Reports that 60% of all maternal deaths globally occur in settings experiencing conflict or fragility.

Human Resources for Health

22. **K. Kubota** - [Training without jobs is a waste of aid](#) (**BMJ GH**). Argues that workforce expansion is blocked by fiscal constraints rather than a lack of trained staff.

Social Determinants of Health

23. **J. Kathiresan & M. Pai** - [Social protection for tuberculosis—how can we make it universal?](#) (**Lancet Public Health**). Calls for political resolve to deliver social protection benefits to every TB-vulnerable household.

Conflict/War/Genocide & Health

24. **M. Spagat et al.** - [Violent and non-violent death tolls for the Gaza conflict](#) (**Lancet GH**). Independent survey showing that violent deaths in Gaza have substantially exceeded official figures.
25. **Ingrid de Zwart et al.** - [Rethinking current famine classification](#) (**Lancet**). Experts call for a re-examination of how famine thresholds are set for urbanized populations.

Planetary Health

26. **AP News** - [Trump administration urges nations to call for the withdrawal of a UN climate proposal](#). Reports on U.S. objections to a UN proposal for climate damage reparations.

AI & Health

27. **I. Bakelmun & K. Buse** - [Beyond disclosure: stop using AI imagery in global health](#) (**Lancet GH**). Proposes an ethical standard to reject AI imagery of vulnerable populations in favor of local creators.

Access to Medicines

28. **Emily Bass** - [Is the United States Planning to Replace WHO Prequalification?](#). Discusses a potential "AmeriQual" alternative that could disrupt global public good procurement.

Key Publications, Issues & Reports

29. **Seye Abimbola** - [The evidence of things not seen](#) (**Health Promotion International**). **Must-read** arguing that structurally determining income and housing should be the central claim of public health.

Miscellaneous

30. **People's Dispatch** - [Remembering David Legge: a tribute](#). A celebration of the legacy of the People's Health Movement founding member and methodical genius.