IHP news 870: Toast – AI summary & some key reads

Introduction: Global Polycrisis and "Gulf War 3"

The newsletter opens with a somber reflection on the "demise of the rules-based order" and the rise of a "polycrisis" accelerated by "Gulf War 3". Current estimates suggest the conflict is costing approximately **$1 billion a day**, a figure many believe is an underestimate. Amidst this geopolitical turmoil, the IHP highlights several critical global events, including the **Commission on the Status of Women** in New York and the crunch time for **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS)** negotiations in Geneva. Other notable updates include a new U.S. State Department umbrella funding platform, Gavi's inaugural vaccine budgets, and troubling reports on the links between Bill Gates and Jeffrey Epstein.

Featured Article: "Optimism and Fears Regarding 'America First' in Mali"

This article examines Mali's transition from multilateralism to bilateral agreements under the "America First" strategy. Mali's health system remains **structurally underfunded**, representing only 5.2% of the national budget, and is heavily reliant on external aid, with the U.S. serving as its largest donor. The shift toward bilateralism presents an opportunity for direct dialogue but carries a **high risk of increased dependency**. The authors argue that Mali's ability to negotiate balanced partnerships and build national capacity will be vital for maintaining the sovereignty and resilience of its health system.

Highlights

International Women's Day (8 March)

Experts used the 115th anniversary of International Women's Day to reflect on the structures shaping society and the "Great Gender Divergence". Alice Evans challenges "one-size-fits-all" approaches, noting that barriers to progress vary significantly by region, from female seclusion in South Asia to conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. The Lancet celebrated a decade of advances in women's health while stressing that **women in leadership** bring essential perspectives often ignored by male-dominated hierarchies.

Global Health Reform & Reimagining (+ post-2030)

Multilateral health institutions are facing a crisis of both funding and purpose. A "rupture in the world order" is extending to global health, making a return to the systems of 20 years ago unlikely. Sania Nishtar calls for urgent reform of the global health architecture, emphasizing that the **Pandemic Agreement** must avoid duplicating existing financial and operational mechanisms like Gavi's First Response Fund. Additionally, critiques of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) suggest they are unlikely to be achieved by 2030, calling for a post-2030 world that values stewardship and justice over mere managerial fixes.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing/Funding

The Global Fund faces a **$5.36 billion shortfall** after drastic cuts from France and a pullback from the U.S., forcing a strategic shift toward the poorest nations. Conversely, Africa CDC is exploring **innovative debt swaps** to reduce debt burdens while increasing domestic health investment. While traditional bilateral aid has dropped, Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) have stepped up, though their funding often comes as loans rather than grants. Meanwhile, the Gates-Epstein scandal continues to draw scrutiny regarding the intersection of philanthropy and military intelligence.

US Global Health Strategy & Bilateral Health Agreements

The State Department launched the **$4.5 billion "Advancing Global Health" platform** to operationalize the "America First" strategy. This model links national strategy with bilateral agreements, potentially moving away from single-disease programs toward broader health system resilience. However, critics warn that this "security-first" framing risks privileging outbreak containment over global equity and could fragment international coordination. Implementation has been rocky; several countries missed deadlines for implementation plans, and some, like Rwanda, have severed diplomatic ties.

Trump 2.0

Concerns are rising over "unethical" vaccine trials in Guinea-Bissau being used as a prototype for U.S. studies under **HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.**. Additionally, a recent executive order promoting the production of elemental phosphorus—a key component in controversial white phosphorus weapons—is facing intense scrutiny for its national security framing. On a different front, ARPA-H is devoting $144 million to studies aimed at slowing aging and extending quality of life.

UHC & PHC

A reimagined framework for health-service delivery in Africa proposes primary care units as integrated networks, with hospitals taking on more research and clinical governance roles. Experts also argue that **Health System Resilience (HSR)** is being "depoliticized" into a managerial issue, whereas it should be viewed as a contested political process shaped by power dynamics and governance.

PPPR & GHS

Negotiations for the Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) system remain deadlocked, with developed and developing countries clashing over technology transfer and benefit predictability. In Addis Ababa, a landmark summit elevated **fungal diseases** to a public health priority, noting they contribute to half of AIDS-related deaths in Africa. Technology is also shifting the field; "geospatial foresights" using AI are proposed to pivot surveillance from reactive observation to proactive intelligence.

AMR

The pipeline for new drugs to fight superbugs is **"worryingly thin,"** having shrunk by 35% in the last five years. Only a small fraction (13%) of antimicrobial projects target priority pathogens for children under five, and many sub-Saharan African countries lack registered pediatric formulations. Experts warn that without more investment, annual deaths from drug-resistant infections could double to 8 million by 2050.

Human Resources for Health

Research highlights the overlooked role of **per diem payments** in global health. While originally intended as simple reimbursements for travel, they have evolved into essential compensatory mechanisms within chronically underpaid health systems, where payment for "sitting fees" often becomes the primary motivator for participation.

Commercial Determinants of Health & NCDs

The WHO Foundation and Novo Nordisk expanded their collaboration with a **$7.9 million commitment** to address cardio-renal-metabolic diseases like diabetes and obesity in low-income countries. However, global progress on **physical activity** remains stalled; despite two decades of policy adoption, 80% of adolescents and one-third of adults fail to meet WHO guidelines. Road traffic accidents also remain a leading, yet under-acknowledged, cause of disability in low-income countries.

Commission on the Status of Women (& other SRHR updates)

The U.S. recently stood alone in its opposition to a landmark UN women's rights document, objecting to language on **"gender ideology"** and sexual and reproductive health. A proposed merger between **UN Women and UNFPA** to increase efficiency has sparked fierce debate, with feminist groups fearing it will dilute their distinct mandates at a time when women's rights are under global attack. Meanwhile, studies suggest that the withdrawal of USAID could increase maternal deaths by 45% in vulnerable West and Central African countries.

Planetary Health

New analysis shows Earth is warming at **0.35ºC per decade**, a rate that has nearly doubled since 2015. This extreme heat now affects one in three people globally, severely limiting the time they can safely perform physical tasks. While some cities have achieved "remarkable reductions" in air pollution, "Gulf War 3" threatens to slow climate action by triggering an energy crisis. A "climate-fiscal timebomb" is also looming, with public debt expected to soar unless climate risks are integrated into fiscal frameworks.

Access to Medicines, Vaccines & other health technologies

A breakthrough study found that the weight-loss drug **semaglutide could be manufactured for just $3 a month**, potentially opening access to millions as patents expire in 160 countries. Gavi is also implementing "Zero-Dose Learning Hubs" in countries like Mali and Nigeria to reach the most marginalized children. Reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that global crisis responses should be framed not just as a "duty of charity" to share doses, but a "duty of justice" to share knowledge and avoid hoarding.

Conflict/War/Genocide & Health

The escalating conflict in the Middle East has placed immense strain on health systems, with the UN relief chief condemning the **$1 billion-a-day cost of war** while humanitarian appeals remain two-thirds underfunded. In Tehran, "black rain" from burning oil depots has created toxic health hazards. Despite these challenges, Iran's strong primary health-care system and the mobilization of 2 million people have provided some resilience against the health consequences of the war.

Miscellaneous

The UN warns of the "alarming and worrying" scale of **child sexual exploitation**, which is being intensified by digital threats, conflict, and climate-related disasters. While many nations have strengthened their criminal laws, these crimes are often hidden or fail to receive the necessary international attention.

Some key reads of the week

1. **Helen Clark & Rajat Khosla**, Global Policy, *International Women's Day at 115*: The authors use this anniversary to reflect on the deep structures and opportunities that shape our global societies.
2. **Alice Evans**, Economist, *What people get wrong about women's rights*: Evans challenges "one-size-fits-all" approaches by highlighting how barriers to progress vary significantly by region.
3. **M Low**, Health Policy Watch (HPW), *Global Health Infrastructure is Changing*: Recent funding cuts have created a crisis for multilateral health institutions with real consequences for countries like South Africa.
4. **Sania Nishtar**, Gavi, *Our global health architecture needs urgent reform*: The Pandemic Agreement must serve as a catalyst for reform while avoiding duplication of existing financial mechanisms.
5. **Tim Schwab**, Substack, *How Epstein & Gates harmed public health*: Troubling new details emerge regarding the intersection of signature philanthropic projects and military intelligence gathering.
6. **I M Kurnia et al.**, Think Global Health, *Indonesia in the BRICS*: This recommended read explores Indonesia's evolving role in the health-cooperation dynamics of the BRICS bloc.
7. **Eberere Okereke et al.**, Global Health Strategies, *From Commitments to Action*: A position statement outlining practical pathways and the need to reframe health as an economic policy in Africa.
8. **Devex**, Devex, *US launches $4.5B platform*: The State Department's new platform operationalizes the "America First" strategy through targeted NGO support for bilateral deals.
9. **S O Aremu et al.**, BMJ Global Health, *US new playbook for global health*: This **must-read** analysis argues that prioritizing national interests over equity risks eroding US credibility and global solidarity.
10. **Daniele Nyirandutiye**, Semafor, *The challenge and opportunity of America First's new health deals*: This recommended read suggests recalibrating health deals despite the current geopolitical climate.
11. **Guardian**, Guardian, *Experts fear 'unethical' vaccine trial*: There are growing fears that African vaccine trials are serving as prototypes for unethical US studies under the current administration.
12. **Health Policy Watch**, HPW, *War and Herbicide*: Trump's executive order on elemental phosphorus faces scrutiny for potentially shielding controversial weapons of war.
13. **H Karamagi et al.**, Lancet Primary Care, *Organisation of health services in the WHO African region*: Expert consensus proposes reimagining health delivery through integrated primary care units.
14. **B Ewert**, Health Economics, Policy & Law, *Depoliticising resilience?*: This paper argues that health system resilience is often incorrectly treated as a managerial issue rather than a political process.

15. **P Patnaik**, Geneva Health Files, *New IGWG Text*: New proposals for the Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) system include contentious language on technology transfer and licensing.
16. **The Elders**, The Elders, *Elders urge progress on PABS Annex*: A plea for governments to deliver a binding and equitable PABS Annex before the next crisis hits.
17. **Andrew Green**, Devex, *Will antimicrobial resistance outpace research?*: Experts warn that the pipeline for new antimicrobial drugs has shrunk significantly over the last five years.
18. **Access to Medicine Foundation**, Access to Medicine, *2026 AMR Benchmark*: The report warns that drug resistance is currently outpacing industry-wide research and development efforts.
19. **Habib Benzian**, Substack, *Presence, Payment, and Power*: An examination of how per diem payments have evolved from simple reimbursements into essential compensatory mechanisms.
20. **WHO Foundation**, WHO Foundation, *Expanded Collaboration with Novo Nordisk*: A $7.9 million commitment to address cardio-renal-metabolic diseases, including obesity and diabetes, in low-income countries.
21. **Andrea Ramírez Varela et al.**, Nature Health, *Low global physical activity despite two decades of policy progress*: While physical activity policy adoption has increased globally, real-world implementation remains weak.
22. **Guardian**, Guardian, *Will UN plans to transform the way it works 'throw equality under the bus'?*: Delegates are debating whether a proposed agency merger will dilute global commitments to women.
23. **Devex**, Devex, *Document lays groundwork for UN Women–UNFPA merger*: This **must-read** analysis maps the potential overlaps and differences between the two agencies.
24. **Matthew Cummins**, Health Policy & Planning, *Aid Cut, Lives Lost*: This **must-read** study projects that USAID's withdrawal could increase maternal deaths by 45% in six African countries.
25. **Nature News**, Nature, *The world is getting hotter faster*: New analysis reveals that Earth is now warming at a rate of 0.35 ºC per decade.
26. **Guardian**, Guardian, *Weight-loss jab could be made for $3 a month*: Research suggests that semaglutide could be mass-produced cheaply, opening access to millions in 160 countries.
27. **WHO Emro**, WHO Emro, *Conflict deepens health crisis across Middle East*: Escalating conflicts are placing immense strain on regional health systems as injuries and displacement rise.
28. **Mama Fatima Singhateh**, UN News, *New challenges in combating child sexual abuse*: The UN expert warns that digital threats and global crises are intensifying the scale and severity of child exploitation.