

IHP 872: Out of Balance – AI summary and some key reads

Introduction and Featured Article

The current landscape of global health is characterized by a profound sense of being "**out of balance**," a theme echoed across planetary health, climate reports, and international negotiations. While the week saw significant activity—including World TB Day and the Global Maternal and Newborn Health conference in Nairobi—the dominant focus was on the **PABS Annex negotiations** in Geneva. Critics argue that current reform efforts often fail to link global health resilience with **planetary boundaries**, and that the elite's focus on "changing Global Health" ignores the urgent need for a more sustainable and fairer economic system. Furthermore, there is growing pressure to address the role of **billionaires and philanthropies** in global health governance, with some calling the current level of wealth concentration incompatible with life on Earth.

This week's featured article, "**Beyond 'Polycrisis': What Gaza Reveals About the Limits of Global Health Governance**" by Duha Shellah, examines how Gaza's health system challenges traditional governance assumptions. Gaza represents a "permanent political condition" rather than a temporary crisis, where decades of violence, siege, and resource shortages have created an overstretched, donor-dependent system. This situation blurs the lines between **humanitarian response** and **health system development**, challenging the separate architectures traditionally used for each.

Highlights of the Week

World TB Day (24 March)

The theme for 2026, "**Yes! We can End TB!**", focuses heavily on **diagnostic innovations**. The WHO now recommends near point-of-care nucleic acid amplification tests and tongue swabs to reach the "missing millions" who currently lack access to diagnosis. Despite these breakthroughs, a **\$5 billion annual funding gap** for TB research remains a major hurdle. Research emphasizes that 67–91% of patients in high-burden settings first seek care in the **private or informal sectors**, which often lack diagnostic tools and digital notification systems. Meanwhile, **PEPFAR** is credited with averting 11 million TB cases and 2.1 million deaths among people living with HIV since 2003. New vaccines in late-stage trials and the **BPaL regimen** for drug-resistant TB offer further hope, though high costs and fragile infrastructure still limit access for the most vulnerable populations.

IMNHC 2026 (Nairobi, Kenya – March 23-26)

The International Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Conference (IMNHC 2026) centered on a push for a "**New Deal**" for maternal and child health in Africa. Africa CDC Director General Dr. Jean Kaseya called for a shift from technical fixes to **system-wide transformation**, focusing on domestic financing, digital infrastructure, and **local manufacturing** of health commodities. The agenda reflects a broader movement toward **health sovereignty** on the continent, framing maternal survival as a test of governance and state capacity rather than just a sectoral issue.

PABS Annex negotiations: final analysis & advocacy ahead of the latest round

As negotiations for the **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS)** system entered their final stages, civil society groups and African negotiators pushed for a binding system that links pathogen sharing to **fair access** to vaccines and diagnostics. Experts warned that the Bureau's latest draft lacks enforceable benefit-sharing provisions, which could undermine global trust during future emergencies. Advocacy groups criticized the **European Union** for blocking common-sense equity proposals while maintaining "empty rhetoric" about global safety. Concerns were also raised that the proposed model lacks legal guarantees for product availability and may fail to align with the **Nagoya Protocol**.

PABS Annex negotiations: coverage & analysis from this week (23-28 March)

The final round of talks began with high tension as the **African region rejected the draft text** provided by the Bureau, insisting on using the February version as a basis for negotiation. African countries stated they would not compromise on the need for "**legal certainty**" and guaranteed benefits. WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that this week might be the "only chance" to secure an outcome, urging delegates to focus on solutions rather than re-inserting old text. The negotiations saw a notable leadership role from **women negotiators from the African region**, a shift seen by some as an indicator of the **decolonisation of global health**.

Global Health reform & re-imagining (+ post-aid)

Consultations with civil society reveal strong support for a **transformed global health architecture**, yet a significant gap remains between their readiness to engage and their actual access to reform processes. Major donors like the UK are pivoting from "donors" to "**investors**," focusing on technical assistance and private sector engagement to help countries "graduate" from aid. While this may benefit middle-income countries, experts warn that **fragile states** risk being pushed further into poverty as private investment often avoids sectors like health and education. The concept of **Country-Led Development (CLD)** is emerging as a central anchor for a "post-aid" world.

US Bilateral health agreements & US global health strategy

The US is implementing individual health **Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** with African countries, with implementation plans due by March 31, 2026. These agreements are facing significant criticism for being **transactional and extractive**, allegedly withholding health funding in exchange for access to **minerals and data**. For example, a State Department memo suggested taking support away from **Zambia** to secure access to its copper and cobalt reserves. Critics argue this "America First" strategy prioritizes commercial interests over human life and undermines long-term strategic relationships.

Trump 2.0

The Trump administration is pushing for **UN cuts, mergers**, and tying foreign aid to countries' votes at the UN. US Ambassador to the UN, Michael Waltz, has outlined a vision for a leaner multilateral system. Additionally, the new **President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST)** has been criticized for being "stuffed" with **high-tech billionaires**—including Mark Zuckerberg and Michael Dell—while featuring only one current academic scientist and very few women.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing/Funding

Concerns are mounting that **PEPFAR** programs funded by the CDC may run out of money, as they are currently operating on contingency funds without new obligations from the State Department. Conversely, a meeting of the **Coalition of Governments on Global Public Investment (GPI)** in Bogota took steps toward a more equitable financing model based on mutual interest and shared solution contributions. Meanwhile, an analysis in *The BMJ* argued that US policy changes—including funding cuts and a retreat from pandemic preparedness—constitute a **Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)**. Philanthropy is also under scrutiny; while **domestic philanthropy** in middle-income countries is larger than previously thought, major global donors like the **Gates Foundation** still dominate, leading to a "billionaire backlash".

Debt crisis & reform

Rising **global oil prices**—spurred by Middle East conflicts—are creating new debt shocks for developing countries. While most low- and middle-income countries are solvent, many face **liquidity constraints**. Proposed reforms include the launch of a **Liquidity Fund** and a **Jubilee Fund** to buy back commercial debts for the poorest nations. Additionally, 220 experts have called on the Colombian president to lead an alliance against **investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS)**, which allows corporations to sue governments over public interest policies.

More on the impact of aid cuts

Preliminary data suggests that a massive collapse in HIV services following US aid cuts has been averted for now, largely due to **committed community health workers** who have continued to work without pay. However, real-world disruptions are still significant; a study in South Africa's **KwaZulu-Natal Province** found that 40% of facilities experienced disruptions, impacting over 800,000 individuals living with HIV. These funding instabilities have undermined labor force training and patient support mechanisms.

UHC & PHC

Leaders are warning that the world is **not on track** to meet 2030 **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** targets, making the 2027 UN High-Level Meeting a critical turning point. Priority areas for reform include **equity-driven primary health care**, financial protection from high out-of-pocket costs, and resilient health systems. Separately, a study in four LMICs found that over half of seriously injured patients fail to reach medical care within the "**golden hour**," with ambulance use often paradoxically associated with care delays.

More on Health Emergencies

Mpox in Africa is exhibiting a **migratory pattern**, moving from historically high-burden epicentres to new regions like Mali, Liberia, and Tanzania. While "ring vaccination" has slowed transmission in some areas, the establishment of new chains of transmission in **immune-naive populations** justifies the Africa CDC's continued "continental public health security" concern. Experts suggest vaccines should be prioritized for groups upstream of these evolving patterns.

NCDs & Commercial Determinants of Health

Global health diplomacy surrounding **Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs)** remains fragile, as demonstrated by the near-collapse of the 4th UN High-Level meeting declaration last year. While the declaration eventually included **dementia prevention**, the challenge now is integration into national strategies. Experts also warn that primary care is failing patients with **chronic respiratory diseases**

(CRDs), which affect over 640 million people globally. Inhalers remain inaccessible in many low-resource settings, and there is a massive shortage of pulmonologists.

Human Resources for Health

Financing for **Community Health Workers (CHWs)** in sub-Saharan Africa remains heavily donor-dominant and **vertically oriented** toward specific diseases rather than integrated primary care. Closing the financing gap will require more predictable government budgets and better-aligned partner support. In the UK, the **NHS** has become structurally dependent on internationally educated staff, saving over £14bn by hiring from overseas, though plans to reduce this recruitment are seen as overambitious.

More on SRHR

The expansion of the US "**global gag rule**" now acts as a "**triple tripwire**" for aid recipients, targeting not just abortion but also "gender ideology" and diversity programming. These rules affect an estimated **\$39.8bn** in US foreign assistance across more than 160 countries. Humanitarian assistance is the sector most affected, and researchers warn that the rules could reach into HIV outreach and gender-based violence work.

Planetary Health

The Earth's energy balance has moved **dangerously out of balance**, with oceans absorbing over 90% of excess heat trapped by human activity. The rate of **ocean warming** has more than doubled in the last two decades. New research also shows that even limiting global warming to **2°C** could lead to extreme climate outcomes far worse than average scenarios. The US alone is responsible for an estimated **\$10tn in global climate damages** since 1990. Furthermore, war in the Middle East has emitted over 5 million tonnes of CO₂ in just 14 days. On a positive note, the **WHO** has been approved as an accredited entity to the **Green Climate Fund**, which could scale up climate finance for the health sector.

Access to Medicines, Vaccines & other health technologies

While the war in the Middle East hasn't yet disrupted global **pharma supply chains**, prolonged conflict could threaten the supply of generics and cold-chain medicines. In India, the launch of **generic Ozempic** could reshape the global fight against obesity. Meanwhile, market forces are undermining access to **antibiotics**, as major companies abandon research and low profit margins drive shortages. Geopolitical "heavyweights" continue to dominate vaccine production, prompting calls for **middle powers** to collaborate on regional manufacturing.

Conflict/War & health

The WHO regional chief has warned of a **health crisis "unfolding in real time"** across the Middle East, urging that healthcare facilities be treated as "safe havens". In 2025, there were over **2,700 conflict-related attacks** on medical facilities and personnel globally, with hotspots including Ukraine, Sudan, and Myanmar. The ICRC has launched a global initiative to galvanize political commitment to **International Humanitarian Law**, aiming to translate international norms into practical domestic frameworks.

Migration & health

WHO reports encouraging progress as more than **60 countries** now include refugees and migrants in their national health policies. This shift shows an increasing reliance on **evidence and data** to guide migrant health systems, even in politically sensitive contexts, though significant gaps in implementation remain.

Some reports, supplements, ... of the week

A new supplement in *BMJ Global Health* argues that **reparations** are a global health imperative. Centuries of violence and extraction have created inequities that cannot be solved by aid alone. The supplement calls for **material redress** for damages related to slavery, racial injustice, and the negative human health impacts of **structural adjustment programmes** implemented by the IMF and World Bank.

Miscellaneous

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, spearheaded by **Ghana**, declaring the transatlantic slave trade a **crime against humanity** and urging reparations. While the resolution received 123 votes in favor, the US, Israel, and Argentina voted against it, and the EU abstained citing legal concerns. The African Union has declared 2026-2035 as the **Decade of Action on Reparations**, aiming to understand how historical injustices shape contemporary global inequalities.

Some key reads of the week

1. **World Health Organization**, [WHO recommends new diagnostic tools to help end TB](#) (WHO). The organization urges countries to adopt innovations like tongue swabs to close the massive gap in disease detection.
2. **JP Smith et al**, [Tuberculosis Cases and Deaths Averted by PEPFAR](#) (*New England Journal of Medicine*). **Must-read** estimating that PEPFAR averted 11 million TB cases and 2.1 million deaths among people living with HIV since 2003.
3. **Africa Health Watch**, [IMNHC opens with push for a 'New Deal' on Maternal and Newborn Health](#) (*Africa Health Watch*). The conference opened with a call for a system-wide transformation in Africa focused on domestic financing and health sovereignty.
4. **Devex**, [African CSOs call for equity as pathogen access talks hit final stretch](#) (*Devex*). Civil society groups urge negotiators to secure a binding system that links pathogen sharing to fair access to medical tools.
5. **G Faviero & N Ramakrishnan**, [Pandemic Talks: Europe is Blocking Health Equity – And It Knows It](#) (*Health Policy Watch*). This analysis argues that the European bloc's negotiating stance acts in opposition to its stated values of health equity.
6. **Health Policy Watch**, [Tense Start to Final Pandemic Agreement Talks as Africa Rejects New Draft Text](#) (*Health Policy Watch*). **Must-read** reporting on the African region's rejection of the Bureau's latest draft in favor of text with greater legal certainty.
8. **HEAR CSO**, [Discussion Draft of synthesis report on regional consultations](#) (*HEAR CSO*). This draft highlights a significant gap between civil society's readiness for reform and their actual access to the process.
9. **The Telegraph**, [The aid system is 'unfit for purpose'. So what comes next?](#) (*The Telegraph*). Experts discuss the shift from traditional aid to private investment and the risks this poses for fragile states.

10. **Devex Pro**, [What role will the Global Fund play in the US bilateral health deals](#) (*Devex Pro*). As US funding shifts, observers are looking to the Global Fund to maintain continuity for critical health services.
11. **C M Savoy**, [The US is sabotaging its own Africa strategy](#) (*The Hill*). An opinion piece critiquing the use of global health funding as a bargaining chip for strategic mineral access in Zambia.
12. **Devex**, [Waltz pushes UN cuts, mergers and foreign aid tied to votes](#) (*Devex*). The US ambassador to the UN outlines a vision for a leaner multilateral system aligned with American interests.
14. **A Green**, [Is PEPFAR about to run out of money?](#) (*Devex*). Researchers warn that CDC-funded HIV programs are operating on contingency funds and could soon run out of resources.
15. **Matthew Herder et al**, [The United States is driving a public health emergency of international concern](#) (*The BMJ*). An analysis arguing that recent US global health policy changes amount to a PHEIC under international law.
17. **NPR**, [He's one reason why aid cuts weren't as dire for the HIV population as predicted](#) (*NPR*). Reports that the collapse of HIV services has been averted largely due to unpaid community health workers.
19. **M Robalo et al**, [From commitment to action: why 2027 must mark the turning point for UHC](#) (*The Lancet Global Health*). Experts warn that the world is not on track for 2030 targets and highlight six critical areas for reform.
20. **Misaki Wayengera et al**, [Africa's migratory epidemic of Mpox](#) (*The Lancet Regional Health Africa*). Authors describe how Mpox is establishing new transmission chains in immune-naive populations across the continent.
21. **Habib Benzian**, [Inside the fragile architecture of global health diplomacy](#) (*Substack*). **Recommended read** analyzing the near-collapse of the 4th UN High-Level meeting declaration on NCDs.
22. **S Shukla et al**, [Trends in government and donor funding for CHW programmes in SSA](#) (*BMJ Global Health*). Research showing that donor funding for community health workers in Africa remains overwhelmingly vertical and disease-specific.
23. **Frank Burkybile**, [Why the expanded global gag rule is a deadly triple tripwire](#) (*The BMJ*). Reports on how new US aid restrictions now target gender ideology and diversity programming across 160 countries.
24. **The Guardian**, [Earth being 'pushed beyond its limits' as energy imbalance reaches record high](#) (*The Guardian*). The WMO warns that oceans are absorbing over 90% of trapped heat, doubling the rate of warming in two decades.
25. **Stat Plus**, [Iran war has not disrupted pharma supply chains. That could change](#) (*Stat Plus*). Industry experts warn that prolonged Middle East conflict could eventually threaten the supply of generics and cold-chain medicines.
26. **P Yadav**, [Multilane Procurement Amid the America First Health Agenda](#) (*Think Global Health*). **Must-read** arguing that global health procurement must adapt to a "multi-lane" reality of mixed donor and domestic interests.

27. **The Guardian**, [WHO warns of health crisis 'unfolding in real time' across Middle East](#) (*The Guardian*). The WHO regional chief urges that healthcare facilities be treated as safe havens amid escalating hostilities.
28. **World Health Organization**, [Encouraging progress in inclusive health policies for refugees and migrants](#) (WHO). A new global baseline shows that more than 60 countries now include migrants in their national health laws.
29. **E T Richardson et al**, [Reparations and distributive justice in global health](#) (*BMJ Global Health*). This supplement argues that material redress for historical violence and extraction is a global health imperative.
30. **UN News**, [UN resolution urges reparations for slavery's 'historical wrongs'](#) (*UN News*). The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring the transatlantic slave trade a crime against humanity.