

## IHP 871: AI summary & key reads – On World Happiness Day & much more

### Introduction & Featured Article

The newsletter, introduced by **Kristof Decoster** of the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, marks **World Happiness Day**.

The featured article, “**When Conflict Enters the Womb**” by Evelyn Nianglianching, examines the harrowing reality of **maternal health-seeking in Manipur, India**. Since May 2023, ethnic violence has killed over 250 people and displaced 60,000, creating a quiet crisis within relief camps where pregnant women must navigate a landscape of fear and displacement.

Nianglianching’s qualitative research in **Churachandpur district** reveals that while primary health centres and government schemes technically remain in place, the system has become increasingly **unpredictable and difficult to navigate**. This highlights a critical global health concept: pregnancy does not stop during conflict, but conflict fundamentally changes how—and if—women can access life-saving care.

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## Highlights of the Week

### PABS Annex Negotiations & Other PPPR Updates

Negotiations for the **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS)** system enter their final week in Geneva with **little consensus** between member states. The crux of the disagreement lies in how data for pathogens with pandemic potential is shared and how benefits, such as vaccines and diagnostics, are distributed. While the **WHO Director-General** expresses confidence in a "landing zone," sharp divides persist: several European nations advocate for **voluntary sharing** to protect their pharmaceutical industries, whereas regions in Africa and South-East Asia demand a **legally binding system**. Some scholars suggest that if legal frameworks fail, **dedicated financing** could incentivise technology transfer. African nations are positioned as key players, seeking to convert their scientific and manufacturing capacity into **enforceable benefit-sharing rules**.

### Global Health Reform & Reimagining

A major **Wellcome Trust synthesis report** argues that unprecedented **cuts in international aid** are serving as a catalyst for long-overdue global health reform. Based on dialogues with 114 countries, the report identifies three critical pillars: **decentralising governance**, overhauling international financing, and securing **regional sovereignty** over data and medical manufacturing. There is a surprising degree of alignment across global regions on the need for equity and sovereignty as foundational principles.

### More on Global Health Governance & Funding/Financing

The United Kingdom has announced a **fundamental shift from "donor" to "investor,"** cutting its official development assistance (ODA) from 0.5% to 0.3% of gross national income. This includes a

**56% reduction in bilateral aid to Africa** by 2028-29. While the UK remains committed to Gavi and the Global Fund, it is **ending funding** for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and the Pandemic Fund. Simultaneously, **Argentina has officially withdrawn from the WHO**. On a positive note, the **Global Financing Facility (GFF)** has shown significant success in reducing maternal and child mortality in 36 partner countries, though a funding gap remains for **adolescent health**.

## Global Tax Reform

Negotiations for a **UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation** reveal a sharp divide: the Global North prefers a non-binding instrument, while the Global South demands a treaty with **reallocated taxing rights**. Additionally, the billionaire-led **"Giving Pledge"** is reportedly losing momentum as tech billionaires shift toward **for-profit impact** over traditional philanthropy.

## UHC & PHC

**Pope Leo** has declared universal health coverage a **"moral imperative"** and a requirement of Catholic teaching. He emphasised that healthcare must be accessible to the most vulnerable to prevent injustice from becoming a **cause of conflict**, stating that "health cannot be a luxury for the few".

## Bilateral Health Agreements & US Global Health Strategy

Recent US health agreements in Africa are facing criticism as **"biomedical imperialism"**. Critics argue these deals demand access to sensitive biological data and pathogen samples—now as valuable as rare minerals—with few guarantees of equitable benefits for African nations. Senegal recently became the 26th nation to join a **\$12.6 billion US-backed initiative**.

## Trump 2.0

The Trump administration is reportedly considering **withholding HIV aid from Zambia** as a tactic to force access to the country's **critical minerals**. A draft memo suggests significant cuts to **PEPFAR** funding, which currently supports 1.3 million Zambians on daily HIV treatment. Furthermore, the administration has launched a **new humanitarian bureau** within the State Department, asserting it can deliver relief faster than USAID. The US has also begun **cutting ties with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)** and has implemented a **"supercharged" Global Gag Rule** regarding reproductive health aid. Domestically, a judge has temporarily halted **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s** efforts to fire the national vaccine advisory committee.

## NCDs & Commercial Determinants of Health

2026 is described as a **pivotal year for obesity management** as patents for **semaglutide (Ozempic/Wegovy)** begin to expire in countries representing 40% of the world's population, including India, China, and Brazil. Generic competition could drop prices to as little as **\$15 a month** (and potentially \$3 in the poorest regions), "democratising" access to drugs previously reserved for the wealthy. However, experts warn that medication alone cannot address the **harmful food environments** driving the epidemic.

## Planetary Health

The combination of **extreme heat and "super pollutants"** (like methane and black carbon) is identified as a critical threat to human health. In Africa, climate change is already driving **cholera**

**outbreaks** following tropical cyclones. A new study in *The Lancet Global Health* projects that rising temperatures could lead to **half a million additional premature deaths annually** by 2050 due to reduced physical activity, particularly in low-resource settings.

### Access to Medicines, Vaccines & Other Health Technologies

The **WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE)** now recommends routine **COVID-19 boosters every six months** for high-risk groups. In China, new regulations demand that manufacturers of **traditional medicine injections** provide scientific evidence of safety and efficacy or face removal from the market. Additionally, a controversial hepatitis B vaccine trial in **Guinea-Bissau** was halted due to ethical concerns regarding withholding vaccines from half of the infants involved. Africa CDC is pushing for **diagnostic self-reliance**, noting that less than 5% of diagnostics used in Africa are produced locally.

### Conflict/War & Health

The conflict involving **Iran** is creating global ripple effects, displacing millions and threatening **pharmaceutical supply chains**. Missile attacks on logistics hubs like Dubai have disrupted the flow of medicines to Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Sudan. Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are noted as the **most vulnerable** to the resulting spikes in food and medicine costs.

### Reports, Series & Publications

New UN estimates reveal that **4.9 million children died before their fifth birthday** in 2024, with progress on child survival slowing significantly since 2015. The **World Happiness Report 2026** indicates that algorithm-driven social media platforms like Instagram are more harmful to mental health than connection-focused apps like WhatsApp. Meanwhile, **Tuberculosis** persists as the world's deadliest infectious disease, with US aid cuts threatening to cause over **600,000 additional deaths** by 2030.

### Miscellaneous

**Natalia Kanem** (formerly of UNFPA) identified **six major threats** to the 21st century: AI, pandemics, AMR, climate change, unhealthy ageing, and conflict. She argued that the path forward must be built on **solidarity and dialogue**, highlighting **Africa** as a continent of "wonderful possibilities" that has a genuine "shot at greatness" if properly prepared.

## Some key reads of the week

### Featured Article & PABS Negotiations

1. **HPW** – [Health Policy Watch](#): A must-read analysis of the high-stakes final round of PABS negotiations in Geneva.
2. **Priti Patnaik** – [Geneva Health Files](#): A must-read "PABS cheat sheet" and curtain-raiser for the final round of negotiations.
3. **Suerie Moon** (cited in Patnaik) – [Geneva Health Files](#): An exploration of whether mandatory financing can overcome tech-transfer deadlocks in pandemic negotiations.
4. **Africa Health Watch** – [Africa Health Watch](#): Analysis of why a robust, legally binding PABS framework is critical for African health security.

5. **N A Evaborhene** – [Globalization & Health](#): A commentary arguing that Africa is positioned to co-design the operational architecture of the PABS system.

### Global Health Reform & Governance

7. **Wellcome** – [Wellcome Trust](#): A must-read synthesis report on the way forward for global health reform based on dialogues with 114 countries.
8. **HPW** – [Health Policy Watch](#): A must-read analysis showing how international aid cuts have acted as a catalyst for structural reform.
9. **Devex** – [Devex](#): Details on the UK's fundamental shift from "donor" to "investor" amid deep aid budget cuts.
10. **Politico** – [Politico](#): A report on Britain's decision to reduce aid to Africa by more than half by 2028-29.
11. **Pablo Quirno** (Foreign Minister) – [Buenos Aires Herald](#): News on the official completion of Argentina's withdrawal from the World Health Organization.
12. **Emilia Lindquist et al.** – [The Lancet](#): A letter addressing the urgent need to close the adolescent health financing gap via the Global Financing Facility.
13. **Emilie S K Besson** – [LinkedIn](#): A provocative piece on how "state argument" within domestic institutions has been overshadowed by donor-centric persuasion.
14. **Habib Benzian** – [Substack](#): Part I of a series examining the mechanisms and hidden machinery behind global health declarations.

### Thematic Health Policy Areas

15. **M E Mamberti** – [CESR](#): Analysis of the sharp North-South divide in negotiations for a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation.
16. **NYT** – [New York Times](#): A report on the billionaire backlash against the Giving Pledge in favour of for-profit impact.
17. **Reuters** – [Reuters](#): News on Pope Leo declaring universal health coverage a "moral imperative" to prevent injustice and conflict.
18. **T Mhaka** – [Al Jazeera](#): A critical take on new US health agreements in Africa as a form of "biomedical imperialism".
19. **NYT** – [New York Times](#): An investigation into US considerations to withhold HIV aid from Zambia to secure access to critical minerals.
20. **Guttmacher Institute** – [Guttmacher](#): Analysis of the "Supercharged Global Gag Rule" and the weaponization of US foreign aid.
21. **Lancet Editorial** – [The Lancet](#): A pivotal look at how generic competition for obesity medications could democratise access in 2026.
22. **HPW** – [Health Policy Watch](#): Expert warning on the critical health threat posed by combining extreme heat with "super pollutants".
23. **Lancet Global Health** – [The Lancet](#): A study projecting that climate-driven physical inactivity could cause half a million premature deaths annually by 2050.

### Medicines, Conflict & Global Reports

24. **WHO** – [WHO](#): Highlights from the SAGE meeting, including new COVID-19 booster and typhoid vaccine recommendations.
25. **Science** – [Science](#): Coverage of new Chinese regulations requiring manufacturers to provide safety and efficacy data for traditional medicine injections.
26. **Devex** – [Devex](#): Analysis of the global ripple effects of the war involving Iran on food and fuel prices.

27. **UN News** – [UN News](#): Report on the slowing progress in child survival, with nearly 5 million children dying before age five in 2024.
28. **Lancet Global Health Editorial** – [The Lancet](#): A warning on the risk of backsliding in the fight against tuberculosis due to severe US aid cuts.
29. **Richard Horton** – [The Lancet](#): A reflection on Natalia Kanem’s lecture regarding six major 21st-century health threats and the path of solidarity.