

IHP News 873: Easter - AI Summary and some key reads

Introduction and Featured Article

The newsletter opens with reflections on the current "zombie multilateralist" state of the world, contrasting the lighthearted escapism of micro-dramas and K-Dramas with the grim reality of global battlefields. Editor Kristof Decoster highlights a recent *BMJ* editorial on the **religious determinants of health**, noting that while some religious leaders call for universal healthcare as a moral imperative, extremists often drive political agendas that lead to conflict. The intro expresses hope that moderate voices across all religions can reclaim the initiative by focusing on shared human values.

The **Featured Article**, "When Seeds Carry Memory" by Sabu K U, explores the profound connection between **Indigenous spirituality, biodiversity, and food systems** in Wayanad, Kerala. For the Kurichiya community, farming is a moral duty to ancestral deities, where seeds are seen as living carriers of memory. The article argues that biodiversity is not an abstract goal but a **lived cultural necessity**; rituals demand specific crops, ensuring that conservation is internally sustained rather than externally imposed. However, this delicate balance is facing increasing strain from modern pressures.

Highlights of the Week

Global Health Reform & Re-imagining

Reform efforts are gaining momentum with a **WHO call for consultation** on transforming the Global Health Architecture (GHA), inviting stakeholder input on a new reform "skeleton" by April 18, 2026. Intellectual contributions include Tim Jackson's paper arguing for **reframing prosperity as health**, suggesting that current health systems fail because they manage illnesses generated by wealth-centred economic models. On financing, the Center for Global Development (CGD) proposes an **IDA health window** to target aid to the poorest countries more efficiently. Meanwhile, preliminary findings from the UN80 initiative suggest that a **merger of UNFPA and UN Women** is "technically feasible," though rights advocates remain skeptical of the lack of concrete evidence for the move. CGD also introduced a "New Compact" for health financing aimed at empowering countries to set their own priorities through sustainable domestic funding.

Latest PABS Round (Geneva, 23-28 March)

Negotiations on the **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS)** annex to the Pandemic Agreement ended in a deadlock, described by some as a contest of "who blinks first". While WHO Member States agreed to extend talks into late April, a "wide gulf" remains between high- and low-income nations regarding vaccine sharing and benefit obligations. Key issues include whether pathogen information sharing should be frictionless or tracked and how to trigger benefit commitments during health emergencies. High-level advocacy from the Global Council on Inequality calls for **automatic waivers of IP rules** during pandemics to ensure equitable access to medicines.

Coming Up: World Health Day (7 April)

World Health Day 2026 will carry the theme "**Together for health. Stand with science,**" emphasizing evidence-driven action in a multilateral world. A major event will be the first **Global Forum of WHO Collaborating Centres** in Lyon, France, aimed at strengthening scientific cooperation for the

Fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 14). Experts warn that "standing with science" now requires robust institutional safeguards to protect transparent evidence trails from political pressure.

IMNHC Nairobi: Final Coverage & Analysis

The International Maternal and Newborn Health Conference (IMNHC) concluded with a call for **accountability and collective action**. Africa CDC Director-General Dr Jean Kaseya highlighted the urgent need for **local manufacturing** of essential supplies like oxytocin. The conference noted that progress is stalling, with neonatal mortality remaining high in 60 countries. Massive aid cuts—up to 58% in some East African nations—threaten to reverse two decades of progress, leading experts to urge African governments to increase domestic budgets for newborn care as both a moral and economic imperative.

More on SRHR

Scholar Seye Abimbola challenges the research community to address "**motivated unawareness**"—where researchers sidestep known complexities of context and place. Using a study on hospital-based childbirth in India as an example, he calls for radical transparency in how research projects justify their interventions and acknowledge local complexities.

US Global Health Strategy & Bilateral Health Agreements

Controversy surrounds proposed \$1 billion US health aid agreements in countries like Zambia, where CSOs fear the deals lack transparency and may be tied to **strategic mineral interests**. Additionally, 90 organizations have urged the US State Department not to withhold PEPFAR aid to pressure Zambia into signing critical minerals deals. Analysis also highlights the impact of the **expanded Global Gag Rule**, which critics say strikes at "ubuntu"-based governance—the communal accountability systems that keep African health systems coherent.

Trump 2.0

Concerns are mounting that **PEPFAR is "at risk"** due to budgetary choke points and administrative fiat, with warnings it could "die by June" if funding remains stalled. The incoming CDC director faces the challenge of restoring the agency's global credibility amid US withdrawals from international aid and the WHO. Additionally, Amnesty International warned that the 2026 World Cup in North America could become a "stage for repression" under current US immigration and security policies.

More on Global Health Governance & Finance/Funding

The African Union has declared 2026-36 the "**decade of reparations**," energised by a UN ruling describing the slave trade as a "grave crime against humanity". In Tangier, African ministers discussed shifting the paradigm to view health as a **strategic investment** rather than an expense. With aid cuts, Africa is increasingly turning to **philanthropy** (e.g., Gates and Rockefeller Foundations) and African corporate foundations to fill gaps, though experts emphasize that domestic resource mobilisation remains the only sustainable path. Discussions in Geneva also highlighted "**two-speed multilateralism**," where "coalitions of the willing" may move faster on health and climate policies when universal consensus stagnates.

Debt Crisis, Global Tax Justice & Related Issues

African countries face economic harm from the current Gulf war, with recommendations focusing on managing external debt sustainably. The UN warned that developing nations are being "**priced out of affordable finance**" due to biased credit ratings that overlook long-term potential. Oxfam reports that the global super-rich may have hidden **\$3.55 trillion from tax authorities**, prompting renewed calls for a global wealth tax to support the Global South.

More on PPPR & Health Emergencies

The **Pandemic Fund** has launched a targeted funding round for 15 high-risk countries (including Sudan, Haiti, and Afghanistan), waiving co-investment requirements for heavily indebted nations. In Africa, the mpox epidemic has accelerated the **decentralisation of laboratory diagnostics**, using mobile labs and GeneXpert platforms for faster detection. WHO also released a new framework defining 12 core capabilities for **National Public Health Agencies** to lead emergency responses.

HIV Prevention

UNAIDS launched a new **2030 Global Access Framework** aimed at reducing new infections by 90% through country-led, people-focused services. However, a conflict has erupted as **Gilead refuses to sell** the groundbreaking drug lenacapavir directly to MSF, insisting they source it through the capped supply of the Global Fund. In Eswatini, the "drop in the ocean" supply of the drug is insufficient to reach all at risk. Experts also worry that a narrow focus on lenacapavir may overlook existing treatment gaps and health system priorities in Africa.

NCDs

Africa CDC launched the **SPARK-NCDs programme** to strengthen surveillance and care for hypertension and diabetes, which cause 2 million premature deaths in Africa annually. A major review found that **vaping** is likely to cause lung and oral cancer, urging immediate regulatory action. Furthermore, childhood cancer remains a severe burden in LMICs, accounting for 94% of global deaths. On nutrition policy, experts argue that **health taxes on ultra-processed foods** may be regressive in LMICs unless governments first invest in making healthy food available and affordable.

Social, Political & Commercial Determinants of Health

Addressing health determinants is now a **geopolitical imperative**, as control of supply chains and data ownership reflects competition between global powers. A letter in *The Lancet* frames **human trafficking** (highlighted by the Epstein files) as a structural public health crisis requiring clinical and research leadership.

Digital Health & AI

India's **digital governance model**, centered on population-scale public infrastructure for identity and payments, is presented as a "fourth paradigm" that could help LMICs achieve universal health coverage more sustainably than US or EU models.

Access to Medicines, Vaccines & Other Health Technologies

The Middle East crisis is causing "**dangerous**" **supply shortages** and 70% increases in air freight rates for life-saving products. In India, MSMEs face challenges complying with revised quality standards for generics, often due to structural dependencies on raw materials from China. At the WTO, the

collapse of MC14 negotiations has left developing countries' ability to use **TRIPS flexibilities** for generic medicines under threat.

Conflict/War & Health

WHO warns of "unseen" threats in the Middle East, such as **water contamination** from attacks on desalination plants. Shipping disruptions are straining humanitarian aid, while activists warn that attacks on Lebanon's health system mirror the destruction seen in Gaza.

Planetary Health

The **Green Climate Fund** is expanding into regional hubs (e.g., Nairobi and Amman) to bring finance closer to the countries it serves. However, major oil producers remain absent from fossil fuel phase-out summits, and the **IPCC** faces a funding gap that threatens future climate science reports.

Miscellaneous

Researchers discovered a **bacterium linked to Noma**, a major step toward early diagnosis of the neglected disease. Finally, activists in Africa are calling for urgent action to combat a surge in **digital violence** against women and girls fueled by a rapid increase in young internet users.

Some key reads of the week

1. **WHO:** [Have your say on transforming global health](#). Stakeholders are invited to provide input by 18 April 2026 on a draft "skeleton" for reforming the global health architecture.
2. **Tim Jackson:** [Prosperity as Health—Recentering Care to Guide Health System Reform](#). This paper argues for reframing prosperity as health to address chronic diseases generated by wealth-centred economic models.
3. **WHO:** [WHO Member States agree to extend negotiations on key annex to the Pandemic Agreement](#). Member states agreed to an extra week of talks in late April to reach a consensus on pathogen sharing and benefits.
4. **P Patnaik:** [Developing Countries: Unmoved; Developed Ones: Unyielding](#). **Must-read** analysis from *Geneva Health Files* describing the PABS negotiations as a contest of "who blinks first".
5. **Joseph Stiglitz et al.:** [Council Co-Chairs call for PABS deal that ensures access to medicines during a pandemic emergency](#). **Important high-level advocacy** calling for an automatic waiver of intellectual property rules during declared pandemics.
6. **Meg Doherty et al.:** [WHO Collaborating Centres: a global scientific network](#). *WHO Bulletin Editorial* celebrating the achievements of WHO's global scientific network ahead of World Health Day.
7. **K Buse et al.:** [Safeguarding evidence for health in the face of political pressure](#). *BMJ* piece arguing for institutional safeguards to protect transparent evidence trails from political influence.
8. **Africa Health Watch:** [IMNHC 2026 ends with call for more 'Accountability and Collective Action'](#). Concludes that newborn health progress depends on accountable systems and financing tied to results.
9. **Joy Lawn:** ['We're failing newborns': The global push to reduce infant deaths is losing steam](#). *Science* highlights that over 60 countries are off-track for neonatal mortality targets as aid is cut.

10. **Seye Abimbola:** [Unawareness, or What We Do Not \(Want to\) Know](#). **Relevant read** calling for radical transparency to address researchers' "motivated unawareness" of context.
11. **J Oga & M Mulumba:** [The Expanded Global Gag Rule and the Case for Regional Solidarity](#). **Important analysis** arguing that the Gag Rule undermines "ubuntu"-based health governance in Africa.
12. **KJ Seung:** [Is Trump killing the heralded U.S. effort to help the world battle HIV?](#). *Science* reports that PEPFAR is being "starved" through budgetary choke points and may run out of money by June.
13. **H Branswell:** [7 big challenges for the next CDC director](#). *STAT* identifies repairing agency credibility and global visibility as key tasks for the new CDC head.
14. **Eromo Egbejule:** [UN's landmark slavery ruling energises African Union's fight for reparations](#). *The Guardian* explores how the UN's "grave crime" ruling supports Africa's upcoming decade of reparations.
15. **HPW:** [Two-Speed Multilateralism: Breaking the Deadlock on Climate and Health](#). *Health Policy Watch* discusses how "coalitions of the willing" may bypass stalled UN negotiations to act on health.
16. **D Bradlow:** [Iran war: what African countries can do to get through the crisis](#). *The Conversation* suggests ways for African states to manage external debt sustainably amidst Gulf war disruptions.
17. **Oxfam:** [Global super-rich may have hidden \\$3.55tn from tax officials](#). *The Guardian* reports that massive offshore holdings by the ultra-rich fuel calls for a global wealth tax.
18. **Priya Basu:** [Pandemic Fund targets 15 countries in revamped funding round](#). *Devex Pro* reports the fund is waiving co-investment for 15 high-risk, heavily indebted nations.
19. **UNAIDS:** [New Access Framework for the new era of HIV prevention](#). Outlines milestones to achieve a 90% reduction in new HIV infections by 2030.
20. **R Granich:** [The lenacapavir paradox: why a promising prevention tool raises difficult questions](#). **Must-read** commentary in *The Lancet GH* on how lenacapavir rollout might clash with existing treatment gaps.
21. **Africa CDC:** [Africa CDC Rolls Out Continental SPARK-NCDs Programme](#). A major initiative to strengthen surveillance and care for hypertension and diabetes across the continent.
22. **Bernard Stewart et al.:** [Vaping likely to cause lung and oral cancer](#). *The Guardian* highlights a detailed review finding strong links between e-cigarettes and pre-carcinogenic changes.
23. **S Galea, I Kickbusch et al.:** [Tackling political and commercial determinants of health through policy and governance](#). *Eurohealth* argues that addressing health determinants has become a geopolitical imperative.
24. **I Kickbusch et al.:** [Why India's Digital Governance Model Matters for Global Health](#). *Think Global Health* presents India's public-infrastructure model as a sustainable alternative for digital health.
25. **Devex:** [Health orgs warn of 'dangerous' supply shortages amid Middle East crisis](#). **Must-read** report on how war-related route disruptions are stalling critical humanitarian supplies.
26. **Dinesh Kumar Abrol et al.:** [The quality challenge for generic medicines in India](#). *IJME* explores how structural industry changes and import dependencies impact the quality of generic medicines.
27. **Dr. Hanan Balkhy:** [WHO senior official warns of unseen health threats](#). *Devex* highlights risks like water contamination from attacks on desalination plants in the Middle East.
28. **Mafalda Duarte:** [Green Climate Fund to expand into regional hubs](#). *Devex* details a rollout of regional offices to bring climate finance closer to recipient nations.
29. **LSTM:** [World-first discovery of noma-linked bacteria opens path to early diagnosis](#). Identification of a specific bacterium offers a major step toward preventing the neglected disease noma.