

IHP News 875: Game On – AI summary & some key reads of the week

Introduction

The latest issue of the International Health Policies newsletter, themed "**Game on**," arrives during a period of "polycrisis" and "capitalist regime change". A primary focus is the **IMF/World Bank Spring meetings**, featuring the new '**Water Forward**' initiative and a shift toward mission-driven development. In the margins of these meetings, positive news emerged regarding the **Lenacapavir** rollout, while the **WHO Director-General race** has officially intensified following Tedros' high-level visit to Berlin. The newsletter also highlights a critical Lancet Comment warning of a **global health research financing emergency**, which has prompted the Alliance to launch a new programme to bolster domestic research funding in LMICs. Politically, the ousting of Viktor Orban in Hungary is celebrated as a victory for EU values, though the threat of the radical-right remains a global concern.

Featured articles

The first featured article explores the "**America First**" strategy in **Burundi**, noting that a recently signed bilateral health MoU between the US and Burundi has surprisingly escaped critical media scrutiny, potentially acting as a rare unifying topic. The second featured article provides a harrowing account of **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)** in the Gambia, where a young child died from a multidrug-resistant infection because the necessary antibiotics were unavailable. This tragedy underscores the urgent need to address global antibiotic shortages that leave children behind.

Highlights of the Week

Read of the Week

The "Read of the week" explores how global health has learned to "**include and listen**" to lived experiences without actually **redistributing power**. Using the perspective of a **noma survivor**, the essay examines the design of global health systems and how they often exclude the very voices they claim to represent.

Spring meetings IMF/World Bank: Primers, reports & analysis ahead of the meetings

Ahead of the Spring meetings, analysts describe the event as a "**real-time stress test**" for multilateral institutions amid Middle East conflicts and a shift in development finance. While the World Bank is well-capitalized, there are questions regarding its **willpower** to deploy financial resources and its appetite for risk in vulnerable countries. The bank is launching the '**Water Forward**' initiative to improve global water security, shifting from infrastructure to system-wide management. However, experts warn that without deeper changes to how the Bank finances and delivers, its **mission-driven** ambitions may fail to achieve real impact.

Spring meetings: coverage & analysis

Coverage of the meetings highlights the launch of **Water Forward**, which aims to provide water security for 1 billion people by 2030 through a model that bundles public and private resources. Geopolitical tensions are high, with reports that a new **climate change action plan** may be shelved due to the influence of the Trump administration. The **UNDP** warned that the Iran war could plunge 32 million people into poverty, describing the conflict as "development in reverse". Furthermore, critical research indicates that **IMF programs** often fall short of growth goals, cause collateral damage like increased neonatal mortality, and lack evenhandedness toward non-Western-aligned countries. Oxfam also revealed that the IMF's tax guidance largely ignores **wealth taxes**, benefiting the ultra-rich while often recommending regressive taxes for low-income nations.

Global Health Reform & Reimagining (+ post-2030)

Global health governance is entering a new phase where **power is being renegotiated**, resources are contracting, and current system designs are proving inadequate. Key developments like the **Lyon Declaration** and the **Accra Reset** signal that architecture reform has moved into formal political negotiation. There is a significant push for Africa to move into a "**post-dependency era**," focusing on political agency rather than just funding flows. Meanwhile, the proposed **merger of UN Women and UNFPA** faces criticism from countries like Sweden, who fear hard-won gender and reproductive health mandates could be weakened.

WHO DG race

The race for the next **WHO Director-General** is heating up as Tedros visits Berlin to discuss Germany's potentially diminishing voluntary contributions and its role in the upcoming election. Two influential German figures are eyeing the race, though the country's official position remains disputed. Additionally, **Hanan Balkhy**, the WHO regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean, is emerging as a possible candidate for the top role.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing/Funding

A Lancet Comment argues that the **global health research financing emergency** is crippling national research ecosystems, as many LMICs spend less than 0.05% of their GDP on health research. The global political climate is increasingly defined by a "**country-first**" approach and a "politics of contempt" that undermines multilateralism and human rights. While the **Africa CDC** director was recognized for exceptional leadership, other reports highlight that Africa loses \$580 billion annually to **financial leakages and corruption**. Additionally, UK health aid has been scrutinized for being funnelled to companies linked to **contaminated medicines**.

PPPR & GHS

Negotiations for the **WHO Pandemic Agreement** are deadlocked, as developed countries reportedly refuse to accept an equitable **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS)** system. Developing nations are demanding **legal certainty** for access to vaccines and treatments in exchange for sharing pathogen data. An evaluation of **COVAX** found that while it was a significant effort, achieving equity requires better coordination and action both between and within countries. Concerns were also raised about the lack of external oversight for **AI companies** managing biological risks and the ongoing threat of pathogen spillover from the **wildlife trade**.

US Global Health Strategy & bilateral health agreements

The US is moving toward a new model of global health support through **bilateral compacts**, with implementation agreements planned for 40 countries by the end of the year. However, there are warnings of "**funding cliffs**" of up to 90% for the health workforce, which could endanger global health security. The State Department is also restructuring the **Global Health Supply Chain**, aiming for greater country ownership and self-reliance.

Trump 2.0

President Trump's 2027 budget proposes a **\$4.3 billion cut** to the global health budget, including the total elimination of funding for the **Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO)**. The administration is also promoting a "**Trade Over Aid**" initiative, which attacks the value of global charity in favor of free-market principles. Any future support for organizations like **Gavi** is described as contingent on "necessary reforms".

UHC & PHC

In positive news for universal coverage, **Mexico** is rolling out free healthcare for 120 million citizens, while **Ghana** has launched a new **Free Primary Health Care** initiative targeting underserved areas. A global study revealed that people's views on health trade-offs—such as saving more lives versus more years of life—are ethically complex and influenced by social context.

NCDs

A major study warns that almost **2 billion people** will be affected by **metabolic liver disease (MASLD)** by 2050, driven by rising obesity and high blood sugar. While advances in care are helping people live longer, the growing number of cases poses a long-term risk for liver cirrhosis and cancer.

Mental health

Prioritizing **adolescent mental health** remains difficult due to pervasive stigma, limited data, and a fragmented stakeholder landscape. Experts recommend adolescent-led consultative processes and the creation of a global coalition to transform the field.

Commercial Determinants of Health

The **fossil fuel industry** is accused of using disinformation tactics—similar to those used by the tobacco industry—to downplay its role in extreme weather events and climate change. Countering this deceit is framed as a matter of both **climate justice** and public health.

SRHR

Digital tools are increasingly seen as a way to transform **maternal and child health**, though barriers to access must be addressed to ensure equity. Research also points to a rapid rise in **institutional deliveries** in sub-Saharan Africa.

Planetary Health

Scientists are advocating for a "**Nature Positive**" global goal to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030, arguing that protecting intact ecosystems is essential for climate stability. Meanwhile, the **Atlantic current system** is reported to be much more likely to collapse than previously thought, an event that

would be catastrophic for global weather patterns. Funding for the **Global Environment Facility** remains \$1 billion below previous budgets.

Human Resources for Health

The migration of health workers from Africa is being reframed not just as "**brain drain**," but as a pattern rooted in **colonial history** and unequal global power structures. This shift in perspective moves the focus away from individual choices toward the systems that create these migration flows.

Update on roll-out Lenacapavir

The US and Global Fund have expanded their commitment to the long-acting HIV prevention drug **Lenacapavir**, aiming to reach **3 million people** by 2028. Rollouts have already begun in several African countries, with strong uptake among priority populations. However, activists criticize **Gilead** for excluding middle-income countries from generic licenses and argue that the current targets still fall short of the 5 million people per year needed for meaningful impact.

More on Access to Medicines, Vaccines and other health technologies

Measles vaccinations have saved nearly **20 million lives** in Africa since 2000, although the region remains off track for 2030 targets. Conversely, a new investigation reveals how **Merck** used patent "fortresses" and lobbying to keep the price of its cancer drug **Keytruda** high, straining health budgets worldwide. Concerns are also rising over a secretive UK-US pharma deal that could increase drug costs for the **NHS**.

Conflict/War & Health

As the civil war in **Sudan** enters its fourth year, the country faces the world's largest humanitarian and displacement crisis. Research suggests that **sustainable development** is fundamentally contingent on peace, as conflict shocks have long-lasting adverse effects on development progress.

Miscellaneous

Progressive leaders are seeking to rewrite the global economic framework through principles of **industrial strategy**, public purpose, and equity. The UN has called for **reparations** for colonialism as a key step toward dismantling systemic racism. Finally, a "stark warning" comes from **Ghana**, where a dispute between the government and a service provider led to the **disappearance of electronic patient records**, compromising clinical decision-making.

Some key reads of the week

1. **Habib Benzian & Fidel Strub**, [Substack](#): An **absolute must-read** on how global health "includes" lived experience without redistributing actual power.
2. **Devex Pro Insider**, [Devex](#): Explores how the Spring meetings serve as a real-time stress test for multilateralism.
3. **M Mazzucato et al**, [Devex](#): Argues that the World Bank's "mission-driven" shift requires deeper structural changes to succeed.

4. **The Guardian**, [The Guardian](#): Warns that escalating Middle East conflict could trigger a global recession and spiralling inflation.
5. **T Hirschel-Burns et al**, [Global Development Policy Center](#): Summarises academic evidence showing IMF programs often cause collateral damage like increased poverty and neonatal mortality.
6. **David Clarke**, [Health governance dispatch](#): Analyzes a system in transition where power is being renegotiated amid structural resource scarcity.
7. **Dr. Olive Shisana & Mr. Elhadj As Sy**, [Africa.com](#): Argues that Africa must transition to a post-dependency era by asserting agency in global governance.
8. **Health Policy Watch**, [HPW](#): A **must-read** on Tedros' high-level visit to Berlin and Germany's positioning for the next Director-General race.
9. **Hanan Balkhy**, [Stat](#): Profiles the WHO Eastern Mediterranean director as a possible candidate for the agency's top role.
10. **Kumanan Rasanathan et al**, [The Lancet](#): Highlights an "important" financing emergency threatening national health research ecosystems.
11. **A Smith et al**, [The Lancet](#): Critiques a rising "politics of contempt" that undermines the cooperative values of global health.
12. **N Ramakrishnan**, [Third World Network](#): A **recommended analysis** on the deadlock in Pandemic Agreement talks regarding equitable pathogen sharing.
13. **Gavi**, [Gavi](#): Presents the first joint evaluation of COVAX and critical lessons for achieving equity in future responses.
14. **J Meline**, [Devex](#): Warns that US support for the global health workforce risks unraveling without a clear strategy.
15. **C Kenny**, [CGD](#): Examines early trends in US foreign assistance contracts, showing a surprising reliance on international organizations.
16. **Health Policy Watch**, [HPW](#): Details Trump's 2027 budget plans to eliminate \$4.3 billion from global health funding.
17. **Nicholas Enrich**, [The Handbasket](#): An exclusive book excerpt detailing the internal chaos and destruction of USAID.
18. **Novara Media**, [Novara Media](#): Reports on Mexico's landmark rollout of free universal healthcare for 120 million citizens.
19. **Ghana Health Service**, [GHS](#): Covers the official launch of a new Free Primary Health Care initiative in Ghana.
20. **The Guardian**, [The Guardian](#): Reports on a study projecting that 2 billion people will be affected by metabolic liver disease by 2050.
21. **O Biermann et al**, [Health Research Policy & Systems](#): Identifies key barriers like stigma and fragmented stakeholders that inhibit adolescent mental health prioritization.
22. **S Narayan et al**, [The Lancet Planetary Health](#): Stresses the critical need to counter fossil fuel industry disinformation as a matter of public health.

23. **L Kpoto & R Khosla**, [Health Policy Watch](#): Argues that technology must be anchored in equity and financing to truly transform maternal health.
24. **H Locke, J Rockström et al**, [Frontiers in Science](#): Advocates for a "Nature Positive" global goal to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030.
25. **The Guardian**, [The Guardian](#): Warns that the Atlantic current system is far more likely to collapse than previously estimated.
26. **D Sims**, [The Conversation](#): Reframes African health worker migration as a system shaped by colonial legacies rather than simple "brain drain".
27. **The Global Fund**, [The Global Fund](#): Announces an expanded joint commitment to reach 3 million people with long-acting HIV prevention by 2028.
28. **WHO Afro**, [WHO Afro](#): Analysis showing that measles vaccinations have saved nearly 20 million lives in Africa since 2000.
29. **The Guardian**, [The Guardian](#): Reports on the catastrophic worsening of the Sudan conflict and the lack of global urgency to address it.
30. **Mariana Mazzucato**, [Foreign Policy](#): Proposes four governing principles to rewrite the global economic framework for progressive multilateralism.