

International Health Policies Newsletter: Issue 876 – Busy weeks ahead (AI summary & some key reads)

Introduction

The global health landscape is entering an exceptionally active period, marked by several high-profile meetings and strategic shifts. Recent events include the ninth meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) health ministers in Kyrgyzstan and a new **€100 million partnership between Africa CDC and Team Europe** to strengthen health security and digital health. Upcoming milestones include **World Malaria Day**, **World Immunization Week**, and the regional **World Health Summit in Nairobi**, which focuses on "reimagining" African health systems amidst a backdrop of "polycrisis" and "predatory power". Additionally, the **79th World Health Assembly (WHA79)** is approaching, with new WHO results showing progress on the "triple billion targets" despite funding constraints. However, significant tensions persist, including fierce debates over **PEPFAR** data, the resignation of a high-profile US State Department official over the Trump administration's global health approach, and an external review of the **Gates Foundation's** ties to Jeffrey Epstein.

Featured Article: Building Resilient Community Health Systems

In his featured piece, Ikenna Eberi Okoro argues that Africa must move beyond the "extractive legacy" of Western engagement to build sovereign health systems. He critiques traditional Western technical assistance and climate finance as often weakening local agency and draining resources. The article emphasizes that **community health workers (CHWs)** are the backbone of primary care but remain vulnerable due to fragmented donor projects and chronic underfunding. Okoro calls for the **professionalization and sustainable financing of CHWs**, asserting that genuine local ownership and leadership from the **Africa CDC** and **African Union** are essential to achieve self-reliant, resilient health systems that can withstand climate-driven disease shifts and debt crises.

Highlights of the Week

World Immunization Week (April 24–30)

This year's theme, "For every generation, vaccines work," coincides with the conclusion of the **'Big Catch-Up'** initiative. This historic effort reached 36 countries across Africa and Asia, delivering over **100 million vaccine doses** to 18.3 million children, many of whom were "zero-dose" children who had missed vaccinations during the pandemic. While the initiative is on track to meet its targets, agencies warn that routine immunization systems still face significant annual gaps.

Run-up to the World Health Assembly (May 18–23)

Ahead of WHA79, the **WHO Results Report** highlights that 567 million additional people were covered by essential health services in 2025. A major point of contention involves the **International Recruitment of Health Personnel**; developing nations are pushing for "**ring-fenced taxation**" — allocating a portion of tax revenue from migrant health workers back to their countries of origin—a proposal currently opposed by many developed nations. Additionally, a resolution is expected to bring **liver health** into the NCD mainstream for the first time.

Global Health Reform & Reimagining

WHO has launched a second round of consultations to reform the **global health architecture (GHA)**, focusing on governance and stakeholder participation. Experts argue for a "leaner" WHO and a radically simplified international system guided by **subsidiarity**, where global institutions only handle tasks that countries cannot perform themselves. The **Global Health Solidarity project** is also working to move solidarity beyond rhetoric by establishing a framework of nine guiding principles for the health ecosystem.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing/Funding

The **Global Fund** is at a structural inflection point as it transitions toward a "shared responsibility" model, which carries risks for vulnerable populations but offers a path to health sovereignty if African representation in governance is strengthened. Meanwhile, the **Trump administration** has shown a rare warming toward the **IMF and World Bank**, as these bodies have adapted to US interests by de-emphasizing climate initiatives in favor of economic stability and nuclear power. A survey of G7 citizens revealed a massive misperception of aid: respondents believe their countries spend 20 times more on foreign aid than they actually do.

Global Tax Justice

Analysis suggests the number of billionaires globally will rise to nearly 4,000 in the next five years, driven by tech and AI profits. This widening wealth gap occurs as the super-rich increasingly migrate to cities offering "predictability" amidst global political volatility.

Debt Crisis

The cost of borrowing for African countries surged by over 90% between 2020 and 2024, creating a "four-alarm fire" for development finance. Despite overall aid cuts, some advocates are optimistic that the US Treasury may support **preemptive debt relief** to prevent total economic collapses in the Global South.

UHC & PHC

Shrinking international aid is forcing countries like **Uganda** to revive national health insurance drives. Concurrently, the UN Permanent Forum on **Indigenous Issues** is highlighting the need to "decolonize" health systems to incorporate holistic, self-determined approaches for Indigenous populations.

US Global Health Strategy & Bilateral Agreements

The Trump administration's "America First" strategy has seen a new **\$12 million health MOU with Bolivia** focused on infectious diseases and health system autonomy. However, **Mike Reid**, PEPFAR's Chief Science Officer, resigned in protest, stating he could not reconcile the administration's authoritarian approach with global health principles of solidarity and human rights.

PEPFAR Data: Fierce Debate

Newly released data shows a **steep drop in HIV testing** (from 21.9 million to 17.2 million) and a decline in new diagnoses under the current US administration. While the State Department frames

these reductions as "efficiency" and progress against the epidemic, independent researchers argue that funding cuts have caused "substantial disruptions" in frontline care and prevention.

Trump 2.0

The nomination of **Erica Schwartz** as CDC Director has been met with cautious optimism, though concerns remain regarding the influence of **RFK Jr.** over the agency. Some suggest a "silver lining" to US travel bans may be an forced increase in domestic African research expertise.

PPPR (Pandemic Preparedness, Prevention and Response)

Negotiations continue for the **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS)** system. Experts suggest a "two-step approach" for the Pandemic Treaty: setting core principles in the treaty itself while leaving detailed, standardized contract templates for later development to avoid reopening the entire agreement.

AMR (Antimicrobial Resistance)

A "catastrophic" survey in **Liberia** found that nine out of ten women misinformedly use antibiotics monthly to "cleanse" themselves after menstruation, fueling a dangerous rise in resistance.

More on Health Emergencies

Africa CDC and WHO are reviewing lessons from the **Mpox response**, noting that coordinated action reached 50 million people and significantly increased vaccine acceptance. Meanwhile, **Bangladesh** is facing a measles severity crisis driven by "immunity failure" in underserved urban slums.

World Malaria Day (April 25)

Malaria cases and deaths are rising again, reaching 282 million cases in 2024. Funding for malaria control is less than half of the WHO target, and there are fears that US withdrawal from **Gavi** will further stall vaccine rollouts. Notably, **Yanomami children in Brazil** have become the first to receive a new single-dose treatment for relapsing malaria.

NCDs (Non-Communicable Diseases)

Cancer remains under-prioritized in global health despite its rising burden. Stakeholders call for a unified governance platform to address system-dependent modalities like radiotherapy and surgery.

Social Determinants of Health

A trial in **Tanzania** demonstrated that simple, inexpensive house designs can significantly reduce cases of malaria and respiratory infections in children. Conversely, the **ILO** reports that over 840,000 people die annually due to poor psychosocial working environments, including long hours and workplace harassment.

SRHR

Access to **safe abortion** is being restricted globally, despite it being a recognized human right. Furthermore, the war in Iran is expected to cause a **30% rise in condom prices**, threatening HIV and pregnancy prevention efforts.

Run-up to Santa Marta Conference, Colombia

A "coalition of the willing" will meet to discuss **transitioning away from fossil fuels**, with scientists recommending an immediate halt to all new expansion. A key focus is breaking the "**debt trap**" where Global South nations must expand fossil fuel production just to service national debts.

More on Planetary Health

Climate-related impacts disrupted **23 elections** in 2024, posing a growing threat to democracy. Extreme heat is also pushing global food systems to the brink, causing half a trillion lost work hours annually.

Migration & Health

New research emphasizes the need for **culturally-grounded self-care strategies** for Arabic-speaking refugees, suggesting these be integrated into formal health services.

Conflict & Health

WHO's 2026 emergency appeal for **\$1 billion** faces a massive shortfall while the US spends an estimated **\$2 billion per week on the war in Iran**—funds that the UN claims could have saved 87 million lives.

Access to Medicines & Health Technologies

Advocates criticize the "selective" rollout of **Lenacapavir** in South Africa, arguing that arbitrary ceilings set by the manufacturer and government will "manage" rather than end the HIV epidemic. Separately, research suggests the EU could save **€27 billion annually** if medicine prices were aligned with real costs.

Lancet Commission on Sepsis

A new commission has been announced to redesign sepsis care, framing it as a "tracer" of overall health system performance and equity rather than just a specialized clinical issue.

Miscellaneous

Amnesty International warns of a "dangerous phase of systemic breakdown" as states act with increasing impunity. Additionally, a 16-country survey found that **over two-thirds of the public** now believe at least one unproven or false health claim, signaling a rise in the questioning of scientific evidence.

Some key reads of the week

1. **WHO Press Release:** Reports on the historic progress of the "Big Catch-Up" in reaching 18.3 million children across 36 countries.

2. **WHO Results Report:** [WHO reports measurable health impact in 2025 amid transition to new strategy](#) (WHO) – Highlights measurable global health improvements despite significant funding cuts to the organization.
3. **Lauren Paremoer:** [Developing countries seek actions on inequities in international recruitment of health workers](#) (TWN) – Details the fierce debate over "ring-fenced taxation" to address the health worker brain drain from developing nations.
4. **WHO Consultation:** [Consultation on the process to reform the global health architecture](#) (WHO) – Invites stakeholders to input on the second round of proposals for transforming global health governance.
5. **C Carlsson, A Nordström et al:** [No One Wins If Multilateralism for Health Loses](#) (Think Global Health) – Argues for a simplified, more focused international system guided by the principle of subsidiarity.
6. **B Impouma et al:** [How African Regional Agencies Can Shape Global Health Reform](#) (Think Global Health) – **Must-read** piece emphasizing that African continental players must be co-authors in global health architecture reform.
7. **Africa CDC:** [AU and EU reinforce their Health Partnership](#) (Africa CDC) – Announces a new €100 million partnership to strengthen public health institutes, health security, and digital health in Africa.
8. **GFO Issue 470:** [Scaling Back, Stepping Up: The New Political Economy of Global Health](#) (Aidspan) – **Recommended read** examining the Global Fund's structural transition toward a model of shared responsibility.
9. **Washington Post:** [Trump administration warms to IMF and World Bank](#) (Washington Post) – Reports on how global financial bodies are adapting to "America First" priorities by de-emphasizing climate initiatives.
10. **Liam Bailey:** [Number of billionaires globally could reach 4,000 in next five years](#) (The Guardian) – Analyzes the "supercharged" growth of billionaire wealth driven by tech and AI profits.
11. **Eric Pelofsky:** [The debt crisis, overshadowed by other crises, is worse than we thought](#) (Devex) – Warns that the surge in borrowing costs for African nations has escalated to a "four-alarm fire".
12. **The Monitor:** [How shrinking aid is reviving national health insurance drive](#) (The Monitor) – Examines how declining aid is forcing Uganda to accelerate its domestic health insurance agenda.
13. **Emily Bass:** [PEPFAR's Chief Science Officer Resigns on Matters of Public Health Principle](#) (Substack) – Reports on the resignation of Mike Reid over the "authoritarian" and extractive nature of current US health policy.
14. **NYT:** [New PEPFAR Data Show Worrying Declines in Testing and Treatment for H.I.V.](#) (New York Times) – Provides the first data quantifying the impact of US aid disruptions on global HIV testing and diagnosis.
15. **Nicholas Enrich:** [Ex-official who saw USAID torn down asks Congress to reestablish it](#) (Devex) – A whistleblower account alleging that the dismantling of USAID serves private billionaire interests over development.
16. **Science:** [After long wait, Trump nominates a CDC director](#) (Science) – Reports on the nomination of Erica Schwartz to lead the CDC amidst concerns regarding RFK Jr.'s influence.
17. **Adam Strobeyko:** [Striking a Balance: Standardization and Flexibility in Pandemic Contracts](#) (Geneva Health Files) – Offers a "helpful" legal analysis for the ongoing Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) negotiations.
18. **Frontpage Africa:** [Liberia: Nine Out of Every Ten Women in Survey Take Antibiotic Every Month](#) (Frontpage Africa) – Describes a "catastrophic" survey finding that highlights a growing AMR crisis fueled by antibiotic misuse in Liberia.

19. **Africa CDC:** [Africa CDC, WHO and Partners Review Progress on Mpox Response](#) (Africa CDC) – Reviews the coordinated action that reached 50 million people and increased vaccine acceptance during the Mpox emergency.
20. **Nature Editorial:** [Vaccines mean malaria deaths should be falling — not rising](#) (Nature) – Asserts that a lack of funding and political will, rather than a lack of tools, is stalling progress against malaria.
21. **HPW:** [Indigenous Brazilian Children Are First in World to Get Paediatric Malaria Treatment](#) (Health Policy Watch) – Reports on the historic rollout of a single-dose treatment for relapsing malaria in the Yanomami community.
22. **Kristina Jenei:** [Factors shaping the priority of cancer in global health](#) (Lancet Global Health) – Examines the determinants that have led to cancer being under-prioritized compared to other health issues.
23. **Science News:** [This simple house may help prevent multiple fatal diseases in African children](#) (Science) – Describes a trial showing how inexpensive house design can reduce cases of malaria, diarrhea, and respiratory infections.
24. **Maggie de Block:** [Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Include Access to Safe Abortion Services](#) (Health Policy Watch) – Argues that safe abortion is a basic human right being restricted by global political shifts inspired by the US.
25. **Guardian:** [Colombia convenes climate 'coalition of the willing' to break global fossil fuel deadlock](#) (The Guardian) – Previews the Santa Marta conference aimed at accelerating the "transition away from fossil fuels".
26. **Guardian:** [Heatwaves, floods and wildfires pose rising threat to democracy](#) (The Guardian) – Documents how climate-related impacts disrupted 23 elections across 18 countries in 2024.
27. **Y H Abdi:** [WHO's 2026 emergency appeal and global health security](#) (Globalization & Health) – Argues for predictable, front-loaded financing to sustain health interventions in conflict-affected states.
28. **Tian Johnson:** [We are managing HIV with selective lenacapavir roll-out, not ending it](#) (Health-e) – Critiques the "arbitrary ceilings" that limit access to lifesaving HIV prevention technologies in South Africa.