

IHP news 889: AI summary & key reads

Introduction

The newsletter opens with reflections from the High-level Political Forum on SDGs in New York, where UN General Assembly President Baerbock used a football World Cup analogy to urge the world "never to give up" on the SDGs despite being at "minute 80". However, the editor notes that simple acceleration is insufficient as AI, conflicts, and the "climate free fall" are already out-accelerating progress. Significant news includes the **official opening of the WHO Office in Tokyo**, hosting a new UHC Knowledge Hub supported by Japan and the World Bank. Other highlights include a worrying Ebola emergency in DRC, a pivotal Global Fund Board meeting, and the latest stalled PABS negotiations in Geneva. Notable shifts in philanthropy occurred as Warren Buffett dropped the Gates Foundation from his annual donations following a review of Bill Gates' relationship with Jeffrey Epstein.

Featured article

The Featured Article by **Kamal Kant Sharma**, "**Unplugging Childhood: Why India Must Rethink Smartphones for Children**," explores the growing dependency of children on digital screens. What begins as a tool for education or entertainment often blurs into a routine dependency that parents find difficult to break. Sharma raises urgent questions about the lack of regulation and the long-term impact on young minds, noting that while India is taking cautious steps, the debate over government intervention and screen-time limits is becoming a global necessity.

Highlights

Ebola Emergency The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is now the fastest-growing on record, with cases climbing 25% in a single week. The case fatality rate stands at 34%, and officials warn the virus is "still ahead of our response". Data suggests the true scale of the outbreak could be up to four times larger than official tallies, as 80% of new cases have no known link to existing contacts. Funding is critically low, with the WHO receiving less than 40% of its \$115 million appeal. On a positive note, human trials for a new Oxford-developed vaccine against the Bundibugyo species have launched in Masaka, Uganda.

PABS Negotiations (Round 7) Negotiations for the Pathogen Access Benefit Sharing (PABS) system remain in the "messy middle". While delegates covered technical ground on click-wrap agreements and federated data platforms, there is little movement toward consensus. Tensions rose over granting observer access to stakeholders, which faced pushback from the EU, China, and the Africa Group. NGOs have even called for a UN human rights investigation into the "foot-dragging" by Western nations.

More on PPPR & Global Health Security (GHS) Realist analysis of health security in Nigeria shows that global health security framing often leads to the centralisation of governance and the

prioritisation of international disease concerns over local needs. Furthermore, experts warn that the "financialisation" of health security is remaking the sector in the mould of private finance, potentially ignoring sociopolitical contexts.

Global Health Reform & Development Cooperation Analysis from the Third World Network (TWN) argues that current reforms focus on "architectural tweaks" rather than the necessary reallocation of power to the Global South. While some propose a "modernised" WHO focused on operational authority, others suggest the World Bank should take the lead via a ring-fenced "IDA Health Window" to defragment health financing. Meanwhile, the Rockefeller Foundation has launched a commission to reimagine U.S. foreign assistance following USAID's closure.

HLPF in NY At the HLPF in New York, the UN emphasized that no country can achieve the SDGs alone, pushing for a ministerial declaration that includes AI regulation.

Global Fund Board Meeting The Global Fund Board, meanwhile, approved new mechanisms for sustainable access to health products and bridge financing. However, a "cringy" proposal to dissolve the Fund's independent evaluation function sparked significant donor pushback, with critics warning it would weaken oversight.

More on Global Health Governance and Financing The WHO Tokyo office opening marks a milestone for UHC capacity building in LMICs. Conversely, the diagnostic non-profit FIND is in upheaval as its controversial board chair, Ayoade Alakija, stepped down amidst donor pressure and mismanagement allegations. In the UK, health strategist Ebere Okereke argues that the biggest force for health improvement is ordinary people demanding health as a right, similar to the political status of the NHS.

Debt Crisis and US Strategy (Trump 2.0) African nations are facing a "bitter irony" where debt servicing costs exceed social spending, forcing them into transactional "America First" health deals. These new bilateral agreements often explicitly require the sharing of pathogens and data in exchange for funding. Experts warn this "transactional" approach sidelines the CDC and undermines country ownership by making \$4.5 billion in supplemental aid entirely U.S.-controlled.

Impact of Aid Cuts UN Women reports that unprecedented aid cuts have left one million women and girls without vital support, pushing local women-led organisations toward collapse.

HIV, NCDs, and Immunization Bill Gates remains optimistic about an "AIDS-free" generation by the 2040s, provided funding cuts are reversed. In NCDs, the WHO released guidelines showing 45% of dementia risk is preventable, while African leaders call for cancer care to be treated as a strategic investment rather than a perpetual crisis. Global immunization coverage has "inched forward," but Gavi warns that U.S. funding withdrawals will cause significant backsliding in 2026.

Planetary Health and Climate A new partnership between the Global Fund and the Green Climate Fund aims to finance climate-health adaptation. This comes as researchers warn of "climate free fall"—an unpredictable instability that makes life uninsurable. Critiques are also emerging regarding the environmental harm caused by "biomedical commodities" like single-use plastics in malaria control, urging a shift toward locally-led, socially-just strategies.

Access to Medicines, Conflict, and AI Aids activists are criticising a "missed opportunity" in a U.S. government R&D deal with Gilead over HIV prevention patents. In Ukraine, MSF reports that attacks on healthcare are "deliberate and calculated". Finally, while AI is promoted as a solution for health

and climate, its massive energy and water consumption is compounding the very crises it seeks to solve.

Miscellaneous UNESCO reveals that 113 countries now spend more on debt than education. In legal news, the U.S. State Department is reportedly planning to "dismantle" the International Criminal Court.

Key Reads of the Week

1. **HPW:** [Ebola Cases Climb 25% as UN Warns Outbreak May Push One Million Into Poverty](#) - The DRC Ebola outbreak is now the fastest-growing on record with a 34% fatality rate.
2. **Reuters:** [Congo Ebola outbreak still spreading largely undetected](#) - Official data likely underestimates the outbreak's true scale by two to four times.
3. **RANI:** [Deep in the messy middle](#) - A must-read summary of the deadlocked PABS negotiations in Geneva.
4. **D Akhavein (SSM Health Systems):** [Playing the payer's tune to govern health through security in Nigeria](#) - Analyzes how health security framing prioritises international concerns over local Nigerian needs.
5. **Ben Hunter (The Collective):** [Why financialisation matters for global health security](#) - Argues that global health is increasingly being remade in the mould of private finance.
6. **Dian Maria Blandina (TWN):** [WHO: Reforming Global Health Architecture on Whose Terms?](#) - A hardhitting must-read analysis on whether reforms will rectify or just manage a fragmented system.
7. **A Nordström (Think Global Health):** [Reforming WHO: Five Considerations for the Next Director General](#) - Recommends institutional and structural modernisations for the WHO.
8. **P Baker (CGD):** [An IDA Health Window: The Future of Global Health Financing](#) - Proposes a ring-fenced fund at the World Bank to defragment global health aid.
9. **UN News:** [Despite hurdles, don't give up on Sustainable Development Goals](#) - Reports on the ministerial-level push to maintain SDG momentum by 2030.
10. **Global Fund:** [Global Fund Board Takes Strategic Decisions](#) - Outlines new mechanisms for sustainable access to health products and risk management.
11. **Jenny Lei Ravelo (Devex Pro):** [Scoop: Global Fund proposal to scrap evaluation team draws board pushback](#) - Important reporting on donor concerns regarding weakened independent oversight.
12. **Devex:** [Ayoade Alakija, FIND's controversial board chair, steps down](#) - Details leadership changes at the diagnostic non-profit amid allegations of mismanagement.
13. **Ebere Okereke (Devex podcast):** [Global health is about power](#) - Recommended conversation on how ordinary people, not just donors, must drive health rights.
14. **A Nasari (Nature Medicine):** [Fertilizer scarcity as a failure of global health governance](#) - Identifies fertilizer supply as a critical upstream determinant of child mortality.
15. **Al Jazeera:** [How World Bank and IMF loans are reshaping policymaking in Africa](#) - Explores the "bitter irony" of citizens paying more for less due to debt pressures.
16. **Abduallahi Tsanni (BMJ):** [African countries "under pressure" signed Trump's America First health deal](#) - Must-read feature on transactional aid deals requiring pathogen sharing.
17. **Emily Bass (Substack):** [Guess Who Owns "Country Ownership" and CDC turf?](#) - A recommended critique of the State Department's capture of global health programmes.
18. **UN News:** [Aid cuts leave at least one million women and girls without vital support](#) - Highlights the "Beyond the Breaking Point" report on the collapse of women's organisations.

19. **Bill Gates (LinkedIn):** ["AIDS-free" generation is no empty promise](#) - Argues that scientific breakthroughs make ending AIDS possible, despite funding cuts.
20. **C Leon-Himmelstine (ODI):** [The World Cup's elitism problem](#) - Examines how the tournament mirrors and reveals global inequalities.
21. **WHO:** [New WHO guidelines: up to 45% of dementia risk could be prevented](#) - Important new evidence-based recommendations for reducing cognitive decline.
22. **R Walumbe (HPW):** [From Crisis to Capital: Why Cancer Care is Africa's Next Great Economic Investment](#) - Argues for a shift from crisis spending to prevention-first cancer care.
23. **UNICEF/WHO:** [Global childhood immunization coverage inches forward](#) - Latest annual data on global coverage and the risks of stagnant numbers.
24. **Johanna Thomson (Plos GPH):** [International, but for whom? Pediatric sepsis guidelines](#) - Critical recommended read on the limits of global applicability for medical guidelines.
25. **Devex Pro:** [Multilateral giants explore new climate-health collaboration](#) - Reports on an unprecedented potential partnership between Global Fund and Green Climate Fund.
26. **A Levermann (Nature):** ['Climate free fall': why the biggest risk to our economies is yet to be recognized](#) - An important learn on how climate instability makes the world unsafe and uninsurable.
27. **G Grossman (Vox Dev):** [Climate change politics in developing countries](#) - Recommended review of why lived climate experience rarely becomes political demand.
28. **Stat:** [AIDS activists slam Biden R&D deal with Gilead](#) - Critical reporting on the missed opportunity to expand access to HIV tools.
29. **MSF:** [The destruction of healthcare in Ukraine is deliberate](#) - Investigates how consistent attacks are impacting medical care delivery.
30. **Guardian:** [Developing countries spend more repaying foreign debt than on education](#) - UNESCO reveals that debt servicing is eclipsing human capital investment.