

IHP news 892: AI summary & some key reads

Introduction

The International Health Policies (IHP) newsletter issue 892 highlights a pivotal shift toward a **"new tax era of development,"** advocating for a move away from billion-dollar philanthropy toward systematic global tax justice. This transition is framed against the backdrop of the **second-deadliest Ebola outbreak in history** currently surging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the intensifying race for the next WHO Director-General. The newsletter critiques the outsized influence of the "billionaire class" on the global health agenda, suggesting that domestic resources and fair international taxation—specifically through the **UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation**—should replace the current reliance on uncertain aid and philanthropy. This week also marks **World Breastfeeding Week**, highlighting a new global investment case for maternal and child health.

Featured article

The **Featured Article** examines the remarkable success of **Goa, India**, which has reported **zero human rabies deaths since 2017**. This achievement was driven by Mission Rabies through sustained dog vaccination, community engagement, and rapid response, proving that eliminating one of the world's deadliest diseases is a matter of commitment rather than breakthrough technology. However, the article warns that while Goa has succeeded, the rest of India continues to struggle with the disease, highlighting a stark contrast in national health outcomes.

Highlights of the Week

Some more AIDS 2026 Snippets

Post-conference analysis from AIDS 2026 in Rio reveals a worrying shift in U.S. global HIV programming, moving from the PEPFAR model to **bilateral memoranda of understanding (MOUs)** that prioritise "transition first," often meaning a reduction in U.S. assistance. These new agreements frequently bypass civil society and key populations, focusing instead on government-to-government funding while expecting recipient nations to increase their own contributions as U.S. support declines. Furthermore, experts like Mukesh Kapila argue that the global AIDS response is being "dismantled," with actual **mortality rates being "guessed"** through outdated mathematical models rather than systematic measurement. Amidst these funding cuts, some organisations like Aidsfonds are merging with sexual and reproductive health entities to stay viable through service integration. There is also a rising concern regarding the growing cohesion of **anti-rights forces** internationally, which threatens progress in LGBTQ+ rights and science-based health interventions.

Global Health Reform

Current global health architecture is described as **deeply fragmented** and ill-equipped to manage overlapping crises, leading to calls for a "unifying process" to rebalance power and restore trust. Proposed reforms suggest moving beyond technocratic fixes to address the geopolitical forces driving this fragmentation, with a focus on regional blocs and state-led initiatives. Additionally, the rise of **Artificial Intelligence** is beginning to disrupt the "value" of WHO's traditional outputs, as AI agents

can now perform tasks that previously required extensive human missions. Regions like **Latin America and the Caribbean** are also demanding a shift from being recipients to "co-designers" of the global health system, pushing for genuine technology transfer and industrial sovereignty. In Africa, the **Accra Declaration** represents a move toward taking control of the continent's own health agenda, framing health financing as a question of national sovereignty.

WHO DG Race

The race for the WHO Director-General position is gaining momentum, with **Dr. Hanan Balkhy**, the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Director, becoming the first serving leader to take leave to launch her campaign. This follows newly tightened election guidelines issued by Dr. Tedros to address ethical and campaign finance concerns. While the field is taking shape, several high-profile leaders, including the Pan American Health Organization's director and the WHO Chief Scientist, have officially ruled themselves out of the succession race.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing/Funding

Dr. Tedros emphasizes that as the WHO enters its ninth decade, the need for an **impartial, globally representative health organization** is greater than ever due to climate change, conflict, and antimicrobial resistance. However, governance challenges persist; for instance, UN agencies face scrutiny for their continued **collaborations with FIFA** despite that organization's ongoing governance crises and links to authoritarian regimes. A "New Paradigm for Global Health Financing" is being proposed by leaders like Donald Kaberuka and Muhammad Ali Pate, arguing that **domestic financing must be the foundation** rather than a footnote, with international aid serving only as a time-bound transition toward self-reliance. New tools, such as the African Renaissance Health Financing tracker, are being launched to monitor these domestic commitments.

Global Tax Justice

Negotiations for the **UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation** in New York could fundamentally overhaul the global tax system, potentially allowing governments to collect an additional **\$500 billion in corporate tax annually**. By replacing the "pay-where-you-say" model with a **"pay-where-you-play" system**, countries could tax multinational corporations where their actual economic activity occurs, effectively making tax havens obsolete. For the Global South, these gains would be transformative, potentially exceeding the total amount currently owed to the IMF. Furthermore, **Digital-Service Taxes (DSTs)** are proposed as a necessary stopgap to ensure that the booming AI economy contributes its fair share to public coffers.

More on the Impact of Aid Cuts

Sweeping international aid cuts are having a devastating impact on maternal and child health, with **newborn deaths surging by 81 per cent** among refugee populations in sub-Saharan Africa between 2025 and 2026. Over 11 million people have lost access to essential sexual and reproductive health services as over 1,000 UNFPA-supported facilities have closed or reduced operations. Nearly **6,000 healthcare workers** have lost their jobs, leading to fears that decades of progress in reducing maternal mortality are being rapidly reversed.

Trump 2.0, Bilateral Health Agreements & US Global Health Strategy

The U.S. Senate has confirmed **Dr. Erica Schwartz** as the new CDC director, filling a long-standing vacancy during a period of complex political challenges. Meanwhile, the "America First" Global

Health Strategy continues to be implemented through **34 signed MOUs**, which raise significant questions about the capacity of partner governments to meet spending benchmarks and replace declining U.S. assistance. Early analysis suggests gaps between country needs and these new co-financing commitments, potentially affecting the distribution of breakthrough drugs like lenacapavir.

Ebola Emergency DRC

The Ebola outbreak in the DRC is now the **largest ever recorded in the country** and the second-deadliest in history, with confirmed cases and deaths climbing sharply. The outbreak is spreading **five times faster** than previous epidemics, partly due to delayed detection, armed conflict, and community transmission that bypasses contact tracing. While the U.S. has nearly doubled its financial commitment to the response, total disbursed funding remains a "trickle" compared to the scale of the need. On a more hopeful note, the first human trials for a **vaccine targeting the Bundibugyo strain** have begun.

PPPR (Pandemic Preparedness, Prevention and Response)

The High-Level Independent Panel (HLIP) is prioritizing urgent action to accelerate financing for medical countermeasures in response to the current Ebola crisis. Simultaneously, the **Africa Group** continues to advocate for equity in the negotiations for the WHO Pandemic Agreement, though many of their core demands for enforceable measures and benefit-sharing have been softened in the final texts.

Malaria

The invasive, insecticide-resistant **Anopheles stephensi mosquito** is spreading across Africa with "alarming speed," threatening major cities like Lagos and Kinshasa. Unlike native species, this mosquito thrives in urban environments and is resistant to all chemicals currently used in spraying campaigns, making its containment nearly impossible.

World Breastfeeding Week

UN agencies warn that millions of families still lack the support needed for safe breastfeeding, despite rising global rates. A new **Global Investment Case** reveals that the annual cost of not breastfeeding is **\$339 billion** due to avoidable deaths and lost economic potential. Scaling up breastfeeding interventions could prevent 400,000 child deaths annually and offers a return of up to \$59 for every \$1 invested.

More on Maternal, Neonatal & Child Health

Progress against **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** is being starved of funding, with total U.S. foreign aid for such programs halving in a year. In global maternal and neonatal health measurement, experts are struggling with "**indicator proliferation**" that serves international accountability rather than local decision-making. Some propose "indicator menus" to allow countries to choose metrics based on their own priorities. Additionally, the effectiveness of health policy dashboards in countries like Ghana and India remains under-researched despite their increasing use.

Commercial Determinants of Health

Public health experts are calling for the application of **tobacco control frameworks to alcohol consumption**, noting that evidence-based policies could reduce alcohol-related disease by 30%

within a decade. Similarly, the **arms industry** is being identified as a neglected commercial determinant of health, particularly in the Middle East, where militarization and weapons trade have profound public health and environmental impacts.

Planetary Health

China has signaled its intent to **lead global climate action**, though its continued reliance on coal power remains a significant challenge. In South America, the **Santa Marta coalition** is being tested as Colombia's new government turns back toward fossil fuels. Meanwhile, the world's eight largest oil companies amassed **\$93 billion in profits** in just three months, reigniting calls for them to pay for the environmental damage caused by the climate crisis.

Migration & Health

Zimbabweans fleeing xenophobia in South Africa are facing a life-threatening crisis as they struggle to access **HIV medicine** back home. The situation is exacerbated by the breakdown of aid talks between the U.S. and Zimbabwe, which has jeopardized treatment for over 1.2 million people reliant on PEPFAR support.

Some key reads of the week

Some more AIDS 2026 Snippets

1. **Aidsmap – New US HIV agreements leave civil society and key populations on the sidelines** ([Link](#)): Analyzes how new US bilateral MOUs prioritize "transition first" over service continuity for key populations.
2. **HPW (Vital signs) – The HIV Deaths Nobody Can Count** (M. Kapila; [Link](#)): An **absolute must-read** arguing that tracking HIV through outdated mathematical models instead of actual mortality measurement is a failing of the global response.
3. **Science - As a weekly anti-HIV pill nears the market, vaccine research faces new hurdles** (J. Cohen; [Link](#)): Discusses the decline in AIDS conference attendance and the shifting research focus toward long-acting prevention.

Global Health Reform

4. **Nature Health – Reforming global health for an age of mistrust, fragmentation and overlapping crises** (A. Lal; [Link](#)): Proposes three transformations—rebalancing power, reinforcing systems, and restoring trust—to unify fragmented global health architecture.
5. **HPW – The Machine in Geneva's Basement** (K. Rifat Hossain; [Link](#)): A **recommended read** exploring how AI agents are disrupting the value of WHO's traditional outputs and contributing to budget cuts.
6. **IS Global - The dilemma facing Latin America and the Caribbean in the restructuring of the global health system** (V. R. Bartolomé; [Link](#)): Argues for the region to move from being a recipient to a co-designer of global health architecture.

WHO DG Race

7. **HPW - First WHO Regional Director Takes Leave To Run for Director-General** ([Link](#)): Dr. Hanan Balkhy is the first serving regional director to take leave for a DG campaign under new ethical guidelines.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing/Funding

8. **Nature World View - Why the need for the WHO has never been greater** (Dr. Tedros; [Link](#)): Reflects on WHO's 80-year history and argues its science-led, impartial role is vital for tackling current global threats.
9. **Project Syndicate – A New Paradigm for Global Health Financing** (D. P. Kaberuka; [Link](#)): Advocates for domestic financing as the foundation of health systems, with aid serving only as a time-bound transition.
10. **The Collective Blog – Making a Mark in Global Health in a Time of Change** (J. Harris; [Link](#)): Explores how Thailand uses global health diplomacy to assert influence during times of geopolitical flux.

Global Tax Justice

11. **Project Syndicate – The Case for a Pay-Where-You-Play Tax System** (J. Ghosh; [Link](#)): Discusses how the UN Tax Convention could end corporate profit shifting and generate \$500 billion annually for governments.
12. **Project Syndicate - Global Tax Reform Is the Key to a Fair AI Economy** (Z. Milin; [Link](#)): Suggests that digital-service taxes are a necessary stopgap to ensure Big Tech pays its fair share in the AI-driven economy.
13. **CESR – Updates from the fifth session of negotiations on the UN Tax Convention** ([Link](#)): Provides updates on the drafting of a UN treaty that aligns tax cooperation with human rights.

More on the Impact of Aid Cuts

14. **Independent - Newborn deaths are surging in the world's most vulnerable communities as aid cuts hit** ([Link](#)): Reveals that neonatal mortality rose by 81% among refugee populations in sub-Saharan Africa following major aid cuts.

Trump 2.0, Bilateral Health Agreements & US Global Health Strategy

15. **Stat - Erica Schwartz confirmed as CDC director, filling nearly yearlong vacancy** ([Link](#)): Veteran agency official Dr. Erica Schwartz has been confirmed to lead the CDC amidst tricky political territory.
16. **CGD (blog) – Where the Trump Administration's Global Health Agreements Stand** (J. Estes; [Link](#)): A **must-read** thorough update on the status and consequences of "America First" bilateral government-to-government agreements.

Ebola Emergency DRC

17. **UN News – DR Congo: New centre opens at heart of record Ebola outbreak** ([Link](#)): Reports on the surge of cases in the DRC's largest ever outbreak and the opening of new treatment facilities.
18. **Reuters - US will nearly double financial commitment to Ebola response** ([Link](#)): The US is increasing its direct assistance to \$512 million as the Ebola outbreak spreads five times faster than previous ones.

PPPR

19. **The High Level Independent Panel HLIP Co-Chair Priorities for Urgent Action** ([Link](#)): Endorses urgent actions to accelerate financing and manufacturing of medical countermeasures for the current Ebola crisis.
20. **Contexto Internacional - Pursuing Equity: An Analysis of the Africa Group's Positions** (R. J. dos Santos Neto; [Link](#)): Critiques how core equity demands from the Africa Group were softened or excluded from the final Pandemic Agreement.

Malaria

21. **NYT – An Invasive Mosquito Is Spreading With Alarming Speed, Threatening Africa's Cities** ([Link](#)): Warns that the insecticide-resistant *Anopheles stephensi* mosquito is rapidly colonizing urban centers in Africa.

World Breastfeeding Week

22. **UN News – Mothers still lack support to breastfeed, UN warns** ([Link](#)): UNICEF and WHO call for better maternity protections and tougher safeguards against breastmilk substitute marketing.
23. **Global Investment Case for Improved Breastfeeding** ([Link](#)): Quantifies the annual economic cost of not breastfeeding at \$339 billion due to avoidable deaths and lost IQ.

More on Maternal, Neonatal & Child Health

24. **IPS (Opinion) – Female Genital Mutilation: Winning the Argument, Losing the Funding** (I. M. Pousadela; [Link](#)): Highlights how progress against FGM is being jeopardized by a massive drop in funding for grassroots organizations.
25. **SS&M – Indicator menus: Intentional reorientation in global maternal and neonatal health measurement** (J. Molenaar; [Link](#)): Explores the shift toward "indicator menus" to help countries prioritize local health data needs.
26. **Lancet Digital Health – Navigating the promise and pitfalls of dashboards in health policy decision making** (L. Sukumaran; [Link](#)): Explores the development and utility of dashboards for child health policy in Ghana, India, and South Africa.

Commercial Determinants of Health

27. **WHO Bulletin – Application of tobacco control experience to alcohol consumption measures** (P. K. Singh; [Link](#)): Proposes a comprehensive alcohol control framework modeled after the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.
28. **BMJ - The arms industry as a commercial determinant of health in the Middle East** (J. Makhoul; [Link](#)): Calls for research into how weapons production and militarization act as neglected drivers of public health crises.

Planetary Health

29. **Bloomberg - China Signals Nation Is Ready to Lead Global Climate Action** ([Link](#)): Details China's new five-year plan which aims to constructively lead multilateral climate governance.

Migration & Health

30. **HPW – Zimbabweans Fleeing Xenophobia in South Africa Battle to Get HIV Medicine Back Home** ([Link](#)): Details the treatment crisis for Zimbabwean migrants following the breakdown of US-Zimbabwe aid negotiations.