

International Health Policies (IHP) News 899

Theme: UNGA 81 – Part Two: A State of Permacrisis | Date: 25 September 2026 | Editor: Kristof Decoster

Part I: Introduction & Featured Article Summary

1. Editor's Introduction: UNGA 81 – A State of Permacrisis

The editorial note sets a sombre tone as the UN General Assembly 81 (UNGA 81) High-Level Week draws to a close in New York. Navigating what is termed a 'state of permacrisis,' the newsletter highlights David Miliband's commentary emphasizing that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were not designed for an era of 'forever wars.' On global health governance reform, the launch of the Accra Reset High-Level Panel recommendations, '*A Sovereign Future for Health*' (dubbed the Accra Reset 'Ten Commandments'), calls for intentional reform and consolidation of global health institutions ('Biggies'). Meanwhile, the *Planetary Health Check 2026* reveals that seven of nine planetary boundaries have now been transgressed, with ocean acidification breaching its safe limit in 2025.

The editorial warns against a shift from 'Change by Design' to 'Change by Disaster,' driven by political polarization, neoliberal fiscal policies, and USAID funding cuts that threaten total chaos rather than a managed transition. At the United Nations, budget shortfalls have forced staff layoffs and peacekeeping closures, creating an internal UN perma-crisis. Amidst these challenges, the WHO Director-General nomination race closed on 24 September with candidates including Spain's María Neira, as global health leaders attempt to pivot toward 'Resilience and Stability' through coalitions of middle powers.

2. Featured Article: New Directions for the World Bank with Michael Kremer

Author: Shubham Gupta

The featured article analyzes the appointment of Nobel laureate Michael Kremer as Chief Economist of the World Bank Group (WBG) amid global aid cuts and USAID closures. Kremer's arrival aligns closely with WBG President Ajay Banga's focus on the 1.2 billion young people reaching working age over the next decade. For global health, his appointment raises critical questions regarding whether health will be treated as a foundational driver of productive employment or merely an outcome of economic growth.

- **National Health Compacts:** Framing resilient health systems as engines of job creation and broader economic expansion.
- **Private Capital Mobilization:** WBG mobilized \$112 billion in FY2026 (up from \$35 billion in 2022), with African private capital mobilization rising 150% to \$22 billion. Drawing on his Advance Market Commitment (AMC) vaccine model, Kremer must balance commercial appeal with health equity.
- **Knowledge Bank Reorganization:** Centralizing research and data under the Chief Economist's Office. Critics warn that deal-making and private-sector priorities could bias research, making it essential to protect independent evidence on health financing and social inequalities.

Part II: Highlights of the Week (Subsection Summaries)

1. UNGA81 Continued

High-level discussions in New York featured strong critiques of international governance. Kenyan President William Ruto stated before the General Assembly that sovereign equality 'ends at the doors of the Security Council,' highlighting that 46 developing nations now spend more on debt service than on education and healthcare combined. On the 40th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development, the UN presented a blueprint to address digital divides and AI governance. Additionally, leaders from Brazil, Norway, and Spain proposed creating a UN global panel on inequality modeled after the IPCC.

2. UN High-Level Meeting on PPPR

Ahead of the UN High-Level Meeting on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPPR), Member States were urged to adopt the Political Declaration. Analyses emphasize that while the draft text recognizes regional public health capacities, it lacks explicit financing mechanisms and decision-making authority for regional bodies. Crucially, health security strategists argue that Article 12 of the Pandemic Agreement must guarantee equal benefit-sharing in exchange for pathogen sample sharing.

3. Ebola Emergency DRC

The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has exceeded 7,800 confirmed cases and 3,700 deaths. At a G20+ meeting convened by the US, donors pledged \$700 million, bringing total mobilization to \$2.9 billion. Africa CDC Director-General Dr. Jean Kaseya stressed that full transparency and dollar-for-dollar traceability are essential. Meanwhile, WHO warned of severe health worker shortages in North Kivu, where cases surged 73% over three weeks despite declines in Ituri.

4. More on PPPR

A landmark *Nature* study led by Rory Gibb and Colin Carlson challenged traditional assumptions about emerging infectious diseases, demonstrating that no single environmental driver predicts spillover. Instead, transmission is multi-causal and strongly mediated by travel time to healthcare facilities. Concurrently, PAHO and Africa CDC launched a bi-regional cooperation initiative alongside Burundi and Guyana to strengthen country-led pandemic financing.

5. WHO Director-General Race

Following the 24 September nomination deadline, Spain officially nominated Dr. María Neira, supported by a grassroots coalition of over 100 civil society groups focusing on primary prevention and climate risks. Reports indicated China was weighing a last-minute nomination. Indonesian Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin presented his candidate agenda, proposing to refocus WHO on core norm-setting mandates and rebuild donor trust to expand flexible funding.

6. Global Health Reform

Wellcome CEO John-Arne Røttingen pointed out that despite numerous reform proposals for country-led health agendas, political commitment to redefine global agency mandates remains absent. Meanwhile, UNAIDS hosted a high-level event affirming its unique role in keeping HIV prioritized, supporting national leadership, and enabling community co-creation.

7. More on Global Health Governance & Financing

Reproductive Health Funding: Donors committed over \$700 million for UNFPA, including £204 million from the UK and a €200 million EIB guarantee to close the \$186 million contraceptive supply gap across 54 countries.

EU Investments & Aid Cuts: The EU launched its Global Health Resilience Initiative with €138.5 million across Africa and Colombia, even as EU MEPs warned that a proposed 40% development aid cut would betray core values.

Southern Advocacy & Reparations: The Gates Foundation is shifting its advocacy focus to the Global South, while Ghana led growing international support for trans-Atlantic slave trade reparations.

National Policies & Health Sovereignty: Rwanda adopted its 25-year Development Cooperation Policy (2026–2050), Kenya established a State Department for Diaspora Affairs, and *Eurohealth* published analysis framing health sovereignty as systemic capability rather than isolationism.

8. Debt Crisis

A briefing by GADN and ActionAid UK illustrated how high debt servicing and austerity disproportionately impact women and girls by squeezing public expenditure on health and education. The paper highlights the UK's 2027 G20 Presidency as an opportunity to expand debt relief frameworks.

9. Trump 2.0, US Global Health Strategy & Bilateral Health Agreements

Following Zimbabwe's decision to decline a new bilateral health Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the US announced the complete termination of all its health programs in the country after 20 years. A Center for Global Development (CGD) note recommended updating US MOUs to protect service delivery. Additionally, State Department data showed US multilateral contributions dropped from \$19.5 billion in FY24 to \$8.6 billion in FY25.

10. World Contraception Day (26 September)

WHO released expanded contraception guidelines recommending extended oral pill cycles (up to 1 year), 5-year implant usage, and 10–50 mg mifepristone for emergency contraception. WHO also published Target Product Profiles for male contraceptives, predicting market availability within 3 to 5 years (by 2029).

11. NCDs

A *Lancet Global Health* study revealed that non-communicable disease (NCD) deaths in Africa nearly doubled between 1990 and 2023 (from 25% to 45% of total mortality), threatening to surpass infectious diseases. At the BRICS Summit, India advocated making healthy lifestyles and mental health core priorities, while WHO released global 5-year survival data for childhood leukemia across 194 countries.

12. Human Resources for Health

A *World Bank Research Observer* study across 10 Sub-Saharan African countries challenged the notion of general primary care workforce shortages. Finding that median providers see only 10.9 patients daily, the authors concluded that perceived overcrowding stems from severe misallocation of caseloads rather than a shortage of personnel.

13. Planetary Health

Fears are rising that future UN Secretary-General candidates may downgrade climate action following António Guterres. UK Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband presented a previously suppressed intelligence report showing that climate breakdown and El Niño threaten global food systems and national defense. Additionally, research in *PNAS* showed that air pollution spiked 23–33% after US embassy air monitors went offline.

14. WASH

A joint WHO/UNICEF report evaluating school WASH progress from 2015 to 2025 revealed that despite coverage gains, the world is off track for SDG targets. In 2025, 429 million children lacked basic drinking water, 460 million lacked sanitation, and 545 million lacked hygiene facilities at school.

15. Access to Medicines, Vaccines & Other Health Technologies

The Global Fund is preparing to scale up generic lenacapavir for HIV prevention, aiming to reach 3 million people by 2028 as generic production starts in late 2026. In Indonesia, a landmark court decision struck down 'patent evergreening', while a CEPS report proposed a mission-oriented EU initiative on mRNA technologies.

16. Miscellaneous

UN System Data Commons: UN Secretary-General Guterres launched data.un.org, uniting 44 million data points across UN agencies.

Vector Control: France released sterile male Asian tiger mosquitoes to suppress dengue transmission.

Science & Authority: A *Science* editorial explored the decoupling of scientific expertise from policy authority in the modern 'unicontext'.

Part III: Selection of 20 Key Reads of the Week

Curated selection across all newsletter subsections, prioritized by editorial markers (*must-read*, lead article placement, author, and source).

#	Title & Subsection	Author & Source	Ultra-Short Summary	Link
1	Equality 'ends at the doors of the Security Council' <i>UNGA81 continued</i>	Author: William Ruto Source: UN News	President Ruto condemned UN Security Council inequality and financial system imbalances where 46 nations spend more on debt than healthcare.	View Source
2	Leaders join push to create UN body on inequality <i>UNGA81 continued</i>	Author: N/A Source: The Guardian	Brazil, Norway, and Spain proposed an IPCC-modeled standing UN panel to address global economic inequality.	View Source
3	Regional Organisations & 2026 UN PPPR Declaration <i>UN HL meeting on PPPR</i>	Author: N/A Source: UNU CRIS	Evaluates whether the draft UN declaration provides adequate governance and financing for regional health bodies.	View Source
4	(must-read) Ebola in DRC is UN Pandemic Meeting's Real Test <i>UN HL meeting on PPPR</i>	Author: A. Mbanya Source: Think Global Health	Urges that pathogen sample sharing under Pandemic Agreement Article 12 must be legally matched by guaranteed benefit-sharing.	View Source
5	Almost \$3B Raised For DRC's Ebola Outbreak <i>Ebola emergency DRC</i>	Author: N/A Source: Health Policy Watch	G20+ pledged \$700M additional funding for DRC Ebola as Africa CDC demanded full dollar traceability.	View Source
6	Congo short of health workers as Ebola remains out of control <i>Ebola emergency DRC</i>	Author: N/A Source: AP News	Highlights severe health worker shortages in eastern DRC following a 73% surge in Ebola cases in North Kivu.	View Source
7	The anthropogenic fingerprint on emerging infectious diseases <i>More on PPPR</i>	Author: Rory Gibb Source: Nature	Landmark study showing disease spillover is driven by complex socioecological context and healthcare access rather than a single environmental factor.	View Source
8	PAHO & Africa CDC call for sustained PPPR investment <i>More on PPPR</i>	Author: N/A Source: Africa CDC	Advances bi-regional cooperation between Africa and the Americas for country-led pandemic security financing.	View Source
9	Spain to Nominate María Neira for WHO DG <i>WHO DG race</i>	Author: N/A Source: Health Policy Watch	Spain nominated Dr. María Neira for WHO Director-General in a campaign focused on primary prevention and climate risks.	View Source
10	WHO needs unconventional leadership <i>WHO DG race</i>	Author: N/A Source: Devex Pro	Indonesian Health Minister Budi Sadikin outlined a vision to refocus WHO on core standard-setting and restore donor trust.	View Source
11	Wellcome CEO calls for rethink of global health mandates <i>Global Health Reform</i>	Author: N/A Source: Devex Pro	Wellcome CEO John-Arne Røttingen urged political commitment to reform global health agency mandates for country ownership.	View Source
12	Funders commit over \$700M for UNFPA <i>Governance & Financing</i>	Author: N/A Source: Devex	Major donor pledges and EIB guarantees aim to close the \$186 million reproductive health supply gap across 54 countries.	View Source
13	Health sovereignty as 'capability' <i>Governance & Financing</i>	Author: N. Azzopardi-Muscat Source: Eurohealth	Frames health sovereignty as national capability and resilient systems that enable effective international solidarity.	View Source
14	Gender Equality and the Global Debt Crisis <i>Debt crisis</i>	Author: N/A Source: GADN / ActionAid	Demonstrates how sovereign debt service and fiscal austerity disproportionately harm women and girls in the Global South.	View Source

#	Title & Subsection	Author & Source	Ultra-Short Summary	Link
15	Protecting Client in US Global Health Agreements <i>Trump 2.0 & Bilateral</i>	Author: Charles Kenny Source: CGD	Proposes key reforms for US health MOUs to maintain funding baselines and safeguard patient services.	View Source
16	WHO expands safe options for contraception <i>Contraception Day</i>	Author: N/A Source: WHO News	WHO updated guidelines to recommend extended oral pill regimens, 5-year implants, and mifepristone emergency contraception.	View Source
17	Africa faces new threat as chronic disease rate leaps <i>NCDs</i>	Author: N/A Source: The Telegraph	Studies show NCD mortality in Africa nearly doubled between 1990 and 2023, straining underfunded health systems.	View Source
18	Reassessing Human Resources Crisis in Primary Health Care <i>Human Resources</i>	Author: Benjamin Daniels Source: WB Research Obs.	Evidence from 10 African nations reveals primary care issues stem from caseload misallocation rather than an absolute worker shortage.	View Source
19	UK shares findings of climate security report <i>Planetary health</i>	Author: N/A Source: The Guardian	Intelligence briefing warns that supercharged El Niño events and climate breakdown pose severe national defense and food risks.	View Source
20	Millions of children return to schools lacking clean water <i>WASH</i>	Author: N/A Source: UN News	Joint WHO/UNICEF report warns that over 400 million school children still lack basic drinking water and sanitation in 2025.	View Source