

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH POLICIES

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER SUMMARY — ISSUE 900

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PART 1: EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION & FEATURED ARTICLE

Editorial Introduction ("Dear Colleagues" by Kristof Decoster): In this landmark 900th edition, Kristof Decoster reflects on the major fault lines in global health governance following the UN High-Level Meeting (HLM) on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPPR) in New York, where rigid "red lines" from the US and EU stalled consensus. While Western leaders debate multilateral agreements, uncontrolled advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI)—highlighted by Bill Gates warning of extreme potential harms—continue to be met with alarming complacency rather than treated as urgent national security threats. As the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) draw to an underwhelming close, the younger generation faces a "triple whammy" of planetary emergency, geopolitical conflict, and AI disruption. Meanwhile, the WHO Director-General race enters its public phase with six prospective candidates (including Indonesia's Budi Sadikin advocating healthy ageing), while the Global Fund Executive Director selection narrows to five finalists amidst concerns over democratic representation. The Trump administration's October 1 launch of bilateral health deals signals a sweeping shift away from traditional multilateral aid.

FEATURED ARTICLE SUMMARY

The Commercial Determinants of NCDs: Early Lessons from IHP ResNet Research in Cambodia

By Srean Chhim, Nicola Deghaye & Grace Marie Ku

Four major commercial industries—tobacco, ultra-processed food, fossil fuels, and alcohol—account for **19 million deaths annually** (34% of all global deaths and 41% of noncommunicable disease mortality). While noncommunicable disease (NCD) research historically focuses on downstream individual choices, commercial actors wield power upstream at political, economic, and policy levels. The IHP ResNet network (led by ITM Antwerp) evaluated policy implementation against commercial exposures in Cambodia, Benin, Mozambique, and Ghana using standardized monitoring tools (Food-EPI, WHO MPOWER, Tobacco Interference Index, and Alcohol Control Index). Initial empirical data from Cambodia reveal alarming 15-year rises in diabetes (2.9% to 7.6%), hypertension (11.2% to 19.9%), overweight (15.4% to 22.9%), and obesity (1.9% to 4.7%), underscoring the urgent imperative to regulate commercial health drivers.

PART 2: HIGHLIGHTS BY SUBSECTION

1. UN HL Meeting on PPPR (NY, 25 September)

World leaders at UNGA 81 renewed commitments to pandemic preparedness, with WHO DG Dr. Tedros noting COVID-19 caused over 20M excess deaths and \$10T in GDP losses. However, the Political Declaration failed to achieve consensus and was pushed to a December vote due to US rejections of equity and SRHR references, and EU opposition to compulsory licensing and TRIPS flexibilities.

2. PABS Negotiations

Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) annex negotiations under the WHO Pandemic Agreement remain in stalemate. Former UN official Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein urged delegates to stop negotiating on camera in public plenaries and called for industry (IFPMA) and civil society compromises on sequence data vs. physical samples and enforceable benefit-sharing.

3. Ebola Emergency DRC

The Bundibugyo Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC has surpassed 8,000 confirmed cases and 3,900 deaths (a 48% case fatality rate), making it the second-largest in history. Africa CDC warned that recent drops in reported cases stem from M23 armed conflict disrupting contact tracing rather than viral control, calling for operational speed metrics and rebuilding community trust.

4. PPPR, Global Health Security & Health Emergencies

CEPI secured less than 20% of its \$2.5B funding target ahead of its next 5-year strategy. Global health analysts urge establishing reciprocal protections for healthcare workers, One Health surveillance harmonization across Quadripartite agencies, and adaptive platform clinical trials. WHO reported a 30% surge in global cholera deaths in 2025, with 90% concentrated in seven nations.

5. WHO Director-General Race

Six prospective candidates publicly entered the contest to succeed Dr. Tedros at WHA80 in May 2027: Hans Kluge, Hanan Balkhy, Ali Al Kuwari, Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Maria Neira, and Gevorg Tamamyan (nominated by Botswana). Key debates center on agency financial stabilization, managing US relations under Trump 2.0, and the 'Accra Reset' push for African health sovereignty.

6. Global Health Reform

Proposed mergers between UN Women and UNFPA stalled without formal action. Commentary in *Think Global Health* calls for reforming WHO's internal federated regional structure and operational boundaries, while research in *PLOS Global Public Health* advocates replacing market-driven models with an equity-centered common goods framework.

7. Post-2030 Brainstorm & Future of Development

Lancet Editor Richard Horton argues global health has lost its radical edge and must organize coalitions around explicit political adversaries. Analysts emphasize that core Rio sustainability principles do not expire in 2030 and suggest replacing GDP metrics with comprehensive sustainability dashboards.

8. Global Fund Leadership Transition

The Global Fund unveiled a 5-candidate shortlist (Mark Dybul, Richard Hatchett, Lutz Hegemann, Joyce Msuya, Janti Soeripto) to succeed Peter Sands. African leaders raised concerns over US dominance and structural board inequalities (40 African nations sharing 2 voting seats) as the Fund faces a \$5.36B funding shortfall.

9. Global Health Governance & Finance/Funding

PAHO opened its 63rd Directing Council under strain from \$134M in unpaid US dues. African nations endorsed the 2026–2035 Strategy for Financing the Future of Health, while DRC mobilized \$130M via a Health Promotion Tax. France announced a record 43% development budget cut (€1.9B), and OpenAI established a \$25B life sciences charity.

10. Global Tax Justice

Tax Justice Network released a tracker exposing \$673B in annual illicit tax flows exiting European economies, with \$377B (56%) moving internally to European tax havens, urging European endorsement of the upcoming UN International Tax Convention.

11. Decolonize Global Health

Dr. John Nkengasong called for overhauling African higher education to dismantle colonial-era structural adjustment legacies that crippled university research capacity. Analysts argue aid cuts force genuine localization and advocate replacing stigmatizing terms like 'slum' with precise structural descriptors.

12. Trump 2.0, US Strategy & Bilateral Agreements

The US State Dept is operationalizing \$24B in bilateral health MOUs across 35 countries, replacing USAID/PEPFAR grants with government-to-government deals without Congressional oversight. Recipient nations face severe co-financing demands; Ghana rejected its deal over pathogen and data sovereignty; US CDC lost 30% of its workforce.

13. NCDs & Commercial Determinants of Health

Pharma firms are repositioning GLP-1 agonists (Wegovy) from clinical obesity treatment to lifestyle weight loss marketing. Mauritius became the first country to empirically prove a reversal of its type 2 diabetes epidemic through gold-standard testing. Chewing tobacco causes 251,000 annual deaths among 241M users globally.

14. Mental Health

A UN report titled *Youth Mental Health & Well-Being in an Uncertain World* urges a fundamental shift from individual psychiatric diagnoses toward ecosystem-based social, economic, and climate support systems for 2.6 billion young people facing compound global pressures.

15. Adolescent Health

A *Lancet Public Health* viewpoint highlights that despite a 10-fold return on investment across the 'first 10,000 days' of life, adolescent health remains severely underfunded, advocating for a dedicated post-SDG adolescent health goal.

16. Planetary Health

Ahead of COP31 in Antalya, climate diplomacy is reframing green energy transitions around national energy security and military autonomy. Health advocates called on WHO to declare the climate crisis a PHEIC, while world leaders approved a UN Declaration guaranteeing statehood for sinking island nations.

17. Access to Medicines, Vaccines & Technologies

Africa's target to produce 60% of its vaccines locally by 2040 faces severe commercial headwinds. Medicines Patent Pool signed sub-licensing deals with 11 generic manufacturers for Roche's flu antiviral (Xofluza) across 129 LMICs, and Kenya secured a manufacturing license for Merck's monthly HIV prevention pill.

18. AI & Health

AI developer Anthropic established a wet biology lab to enable its Claude AI model to direct laboratory robotics for automated drug discovery. Massive AI philanthropy from OpenAI and Anthropic is poised to disrupt traditional global development assistance models.

19. Miscellaneous

The UN human rights architecture faces internal hollowing out. Health equity scholars published a satirical guide on avoiding superficial equity rhetoric, while structural health system studies examined programme-based budgeting and primary care workforce distribution in sub-Saharan Africa.

PART 3: TOP 30 KEY READS OF THE WEEK

Curated selection of 30 essential reads across all newsletter subsections, prioritized by editorial indicators ('must-read', 'important read', 'recommended', lead articles).

#	Author / Source	Title & Publication	Ultra-Short Summary
1	WHO WHO Press Release	World leaders renew commitment to protect the world from future pandemics	High-level declaration underscores global pandemic action, though pathogen-sharing & financing remain disputed.
2	Health Policy Watch Health Policy Watch	UN Declaration on Pandemic Readiness Appears Headed for Approval in December	Must-read detailing how US and EU objections forced the UN declaration to a formal GA vote in December.
3	Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein Devex Check-up	Elders know best?	Former UN official urges PABS delegates to stop public on-screen negotiating and push for compromise.
4	Sumegha Asthana et al. Lancet Reg Health SE Asia	Unresolved issues in the pandemic agreement's PABS system annex	Examines critical ambiguities in pathogen genetic sequence data and benefit-sharing mechanisms.
5	Health Policy Watch Health Policy Watch	Conflict May Explain Drop in Ebola Cases, as Amnesty Documents M23 'Abuses' in DRC	Africa CDC warns armed conflict in eastern DRC disrupts contact tracing, masking true Ebola spread.
6	Justin O. Nwofe et al. BMJ Global Health	The 2026 Ebola outbreak and the politics of forgetting	Highlights 'preparedness inflation' and political neglect causing institutions to lose momentum between crises.

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7	A D Usher Development Today	Sluggish donor response to CEPI's pandemic prevention ask	CEPI has secured less than 20% of its \$2.5B goal with three months remaining before its next cycle.
8	Iris A Holmes et al. Lancet Planetary Health	International organisations agree on surveillance importance, but not on definition	Reveals conceptual divergences in how Quadripartite agencies define One Health surveillance.
9	Health Policy Watch Health Policy Watch	As WHO Nominations Close, Six Contenders Emerge	Details the six candidates entering the WHO leadership contest leading to WHA80 election.
10	Budi Gunadi Sadikin Campaign Platform	Healthy Long Lives for All	Platform by Indonesian DG candidate proposing country-centric delivery focused on healthy ageing.
11	Summer Galloway Think Global Health	WHO Elections: Reform Without Reckoning	Recommended analysis arguing WHO reform requires confronting its internal federated structure.
12	Pooja Yerramilli et al. PLOS Global Public Health	Reclaiming the new era in global health: Equity-centered paradigm	Proposes re-anchoring global health architecture around health equity as a normative principle.
13	Richard Horton The Lancet (Offline)	Bringing hope, organising action	Must-read editorial calling for radicalism and movement-building as the SDG era ends.
14	Roberto Bissio Social Watch	What options remain for global sustainability policy?	Argues Rio sustainability principles do not expire in 2030 and advocates replacing GDP metrics.
15	Devex Devex	Here are the contenders fighting to lead the Global Fund	Announces the official 5-candidate shortlist competing to succeed Peter Sands at Global Fund.
16	Health Policy Watch Health Policy Watch	Global Fund Leadership Shortlist Unveiled Amid Donor Friction	Must-read analysis on US-European donor tensions and governance inequalities in Global Fund.
17	Health Policy Watch Health Policy Watch	PAHO's Annual Meeting Opens Amid Political Tension and Unpaid Dues	Reports on Americas health progress alongside political strain over \$134M unpaid US dues.
18	M Blecher et al. ODI Expert Comment	Building resilient health systems: Finance & Health collaboration	Recommended commentary on aligning African finance and health ministries for 2026–2035 strategy.
19	Tax Justice Network Tax Justice Network	Europe-on-Europe tax pillaging revealed by new tracker	Exposes that 56% (\$377B) of illicit European tax flows move to internal European tax havens.
20	Dr. John Nkengasong The Guardian	Africa's universities need overhaul to harness young talent	Calls for decolonizing African higher education to transform universities into research hubs.
21	Devex Devex	Scoop: US to launch global health plans Congress hasn't seen	Reveals US State Dept launching \$24B+ bilateral health plans in 35 countries without public oversight.
22	Emily Bass Health Policy Watch	Despite Deadline, US Bilateral Health Deals Not Ready	Explains why funding under new bilateral MOUs remains stalled as recipient countries struggle with budgets.
23	Stat News Stat News	GLP-1s: Obesity medicines for patients become lifestyle drugs for customers	Documents Novo Nordisk's commercial repositioning of Wegovy toward lifestyle weight loss marketing.
24	Medical Xpress Lancet Diabetes & Endo	Mauritius first country to prove reversing type 2 diabetes epidemic	Landmark clinical survey showing Mauritius turned the tide on its national type 2 diabetes epidemic.
25	UN Youth & UNU-IIGH UN Press Release	New UN Report Calls for Ecosystem-based Youth Mental Health	Urges shift from individual clinical diagnosis to holistic social ecosystems supporting 2.6B youth.
26	Prof. Susan M Sawyer et al. Lancet Public Health	Securing our global future: investing in adolescent health	Argues for sustained investment across 'first 10,000 days' of life and dedicated post-SDG goal.
27	Health Policy Watch Health Policy Watch	Energy Costs of War Drive Calls for Green Transition at UNGA	Analyzes diplomatic shift reframing green energy around national security autonomy ahead of COP31.
28	Science Magazine Science	Can Africa make 60% of its vaccines by 2040?	Examines commercial and regulatory headwinds facing South African local vaccine manufacturers.

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29	Reuters Reuters	Anthropic quietly sets up biology lab as it ramps AI drug program	Reports on Anthropic's new wet lab facility designed for Claude AI to direct robotics in drug discovery.
30	A Koay, R Burgess et al. PLOS Global Public Health	How (not) to write about health equity	A satirical and insightful guide to writing about health equity with authority and genuine nuance.