



**2023 Rhodes Policy Summit**

**Creating a Positive Legacy  
from the Pandemic**

# **IMPACT REPORT**





## Pandemic Reflections

Perspectives on the early days of Covid-19

**Dr. Jessica Davis**  
Associate Research Scientist,  
Northwestern University

**Professor George Fu Gao**  
Former Head of the Chinese CDC

**Dr. Harriet Arangow Tegegn**  
Head of Division for Health Emergencies  
Preparedness and Response,  
Africa CDC

**Professor Ngina Woods**  
New Zealand & Global Post  
Docs, Security School of Government,  
University of Oxford

**Moderator:  
Helene-Mini van der Westhuizen**  
Paul Rice Operations, Infectious  
& Crisis Surveillance 2018  
Global Health Fellow, Rhoads Trust & Global  
Health Security Consortium



## **THE RHODES TRUST AS CONVENING PARTNER**

For the Rhodes Trust, a philanthropic organisation committed to investing in lifelong fellowships of people committed to tackling the world's great challenges, this inaugural Policy Summit was an opportunity to ignite the power of convening across traditional boundaries and to drive collaboration for impact. This was the first event of this type convened by the Lifelong Programmes team at the Rhodes Trust that engaged the Rhodes scholar-in-residence and alumni community and a broader global health audience. This event was made possible by the generous leadership support of Philip and Margaret Ma. We are deeply grateful.

The Global Health Security Consortium (a collaboration between the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Lawrence J. Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine and researchers at Oxford University) was the knowledge partner for this event and has helped to sustain action on the outputs of the Policy Summit.

## **THE FOCUS OF THE SUMMIT: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF PANIC TO NEGLECT WITH AN ALWAYS ON APPROACH**

With public and political interest in pandemic preparedness at risk, the inaugural Rhodes Policy Summit that took place in April 2023 asked how we can ensure we have equitable and practical measures in place to prepare us for the next global health crisis. The Summit set out an Always On approach to pandemic preparedness: where global health architecture is developed that can be used for routine healthcare delivery and when responding to the next pandemic. This includes developing capacities for digital infrastructure, vaccination, surveillance and manufacturing that could pivot between use for pandemics and during routine care.

### **It is aligned to three core principles:**

- 1. Utility for routine healthcare and pandemics;**
- 2. Economic viability and sustainability; and**
- 3. Ensuring equity and access**

Throughout the Summit, 280 in-person and online participants discussed how policy makers, funding organisations and governments should by preference fund policy measures that can be Always On rather than part of a standalone crisis response. (For a video with highlights, [click here](#)) Policy Summit participants included representatives of key global health organisations, industry, academia and government.

## SPEAKERS INCLUDED:

- **Tony Blair**, Executive Chairman, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, and Former Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- **Professor Ngaire Woods**, Dean of the Blavatnik School for Government, University of Oxford
- **Dr David Agus**, Founding Director and CEO of The Lawrence J. Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine
- **Professor Glenda Gray**, President & CEO, South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC)
- **Professor Sir John Bell**, Immunologist and Regius Professor of Medicine, University of Oxford
- **Professor George Fu Gao**, Former Director, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- **Hannah Kettler**, Director of Design and Operationalisation of COVAX, Gavi
- **Dr Amadou Sall**, CEO of Institut Pasteur, Senegal

To view the full programme [click here](#). For recordings of the sessions [click here](#). For a summary of key insights [click here](#).



Tony Blair, Executive Chairman, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, and Former Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

*“What we can do today looks completely different from what we could do 10 years ago.”*



**Sir John Bell**

(Alberta & Magdalen 1975) Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford



Policy Summit participants at the IET, London



*“What I enjoyed the most was the range of speakers and the focus on action to take the Always On approach forwards.”*

**Attendee**

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH POLLING

Polling was commissioned for this Summit and conducted by YouGov, with 3,744 people across the United Kingdom (n= 2078), the United States of America (n= 1166) and South Africa (n=500) which highlighted high levels of public support for advancing the agenda of this Policy Summit. The data were collected between 13 and 20 March 2023. Pertinent UK findings include:

- 59% of the UK public think politicians aren't taking the threat of future pandemics seriously.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of people in the UK think governments should be doing more to work with other governments to provide an early warning of threats from diseases around the world.
- Similarly, 72% think politicians should be working more with other governments to prevent diseases spreading around the world.
- Three in five of the UK public (60%) think wealthier governments should be doing more to share access to vaccines during emergencies with low- and middle-income countries, while over half (52%) think wealthier governments should be doing more to support these countries to develop their own vaccines.

These polling findings stimulated further press interest in the Policy Summit, with total press coverage being 380 pieces.



Dr Amadou Sall, CEO of Institut Pasteur, Senegal

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

The conference-style Summit was followed by four roundtable discussions that convened a small group of experts to refine the outputs of the Summit and were deep dives into translating ideas from the Summit into action. They focused on:

**1**

### **ENABLING EARLY PANDEMIC WARNINGS BY CREATING ALWAYS ON PATHOGEN SURVEILLANCE**

Strengthening pathogen surveillance is essential to combat existing and future outbreaks of infectious diseases. This will enable better, proactive identification of pathogens as they appear. Participants brought expertise from diagnostics, wastewater surveillance, national disease surveys, industry partners developing sequencing tools and academia. Discussions focussed on how to get to this Always On ideal, highlighting the need to see an increase in global pathogen sequencing capacity, particularly in lower and middle-income countries. Participants also felt there was a need for genomic data to be linked to public health metadata to improve the coordination of pandemic responses. These conversations were continued beyond this initial meeting, and as an output of this discussion, a consensus statement was developed that refined what an Always On approach is, and which enablers would need to be put in place to utilize this novel approach. A group of experts are continuing to work on this topic and supporting a country-level strategy led by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change to pilot this approach in Rwanda.

**2**

### **EXPANDING CLINICAL RESEARCH CAPACITY IN LOWER AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES**

Clinical research was at the heart of the global response to Covid-19 with rapid trial delivery resulting in the fastest development, regulatory approval and rollout of vaccines in history – saving millions of lives. However, clinical research capacity is overly concentrated in high-income countries, with just 2% of global vaccine trials taking place in Africa. Building clinical research capacity in Low and Middle-income Countries (LMICs) that is economically sustainable can make trial delivery more efficient and effective is important. It can help create new research opportunities where local researchers can respond to some of the most pressing public health priorities. It could also help to address persistent inequities in access to new vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics to combat future pandemic threats through the development of local and regional solutions. This roundtable discussion was led by Dr Trevor Mundel (President of Global Health at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, South Africa-at-Large & Balliol 1984), and Dr Tariro Makadzange (Founder of the Charles River Medical Group, Zimbabwe & Balliol 1999). Participants included key role-players in clinical trial research in Africa, including representatives from academic institutions, those running clinical trials as investigators in LMICs, industry representatives such as IQVIA and Unizima, the Africa CDC, and clinical trial regulatory bodies. As an output from this roundtable, GHSC is working with donors and research units in Africa to identify opportunities to strengthen clinical research infrastructure.

**3****INCREASING ADULT VACCINATION, IMPROVING VACCINATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND BOLSTER FUTURE PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS**

There is an exciting pipeline of novel vaccines, accelerated by investments during the COVID-19 pandemic in vaccine development and delivery infrastructure. We need to act now to create an economically sustainable and Always On approach to adult vaccination which makes use of these new products, keeps Covid-19 infrastructure investments warm and ensures we are better prepared with adult vaccination infrastructure to respond to future pandemic threats. This means coordinating the untapped demand for, and supply of, next-generation vaccines to tackle diseases such as tuberculosis, dengue, human papillomavirus, malaria, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and tuberculosis, as well as novel injectable prophylactics for conditions including heart disease and HIV. At this roundtable discussion, health policy leaders of governments, industry (including BioNTech), a representative from GAVI and research organisations shared learning to develop a strategy to collectively advocate for an adult vaccination agenda. As an output of this discussion, a £2 million pound research proposal was submitted to the Medical Research Council that would support a pilot for strengthening adult vaccination infrastructure in Rwanda, which was facilitated by the four partners meeting at the Policy Summit.

**4****SUPPORTING PUBLIC TRUST IN SCIENCE AND PANDEMIC POLICY DELIVERY**

Misinformation and mistrust in pandemic prevention policies played a major role in whether preventative measures for COVID-19 were used. The 'spill over' of COVID-19 misinformation – for example on routine vaccination campaigns and the uptake of novel vaccines – has important implications for routine healthcare delivery and future pandemic preparedness. This roundtable brought together media experts from the United Kingdom, South Africa and Taiwan to develop a better understanding of the roots of mistrust in pandemic prevention policy. There was consensus that building trust requires partnerships between civil society, global health organisations, the media and community leaders. It has led to two new collaborations – an opinion piece that will be published in Bhekisisa that highlight key discussion points and a multidisciplinary academic journal publication.



Mia Malan, Editor-in-chief of Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism moderating the roundtable discussion

## ESTABLISHING A GLOBAL HEALTH FELLOWSHIP TO SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE

Dr Helene-Mari van der Westhuizen is a Rhodes scholar (Paul Roos Gymnasium & Green Templeton College, 2018) and medical doctor from South Africa who completed her DPhil at Oxford University. Her research focusses on controlling the spread of infectious diseases, particularly in low resource settings. She was awarded a Fellowship in Global Health to work with the Rhodes Trust and Global Health Security Consortium to help convene the Policy Summit and drive action on the outputs.



Dr Helene-Mari van der Westhuizen (Global Health Fellow) and Prof Dame Anna Dominiczak (Chief Scientist Health Scotland)

**Helene-Mari said,** *'This Fellowship was an incredible career opportunity for me to gain a better understanding of what it takes to drive action in global health. I found the partnership with the Global Health Security Consortium particularly valuable in learning about communicating with politicians as a key audience for global health policy, and developed new skills in writing policy briefs and moderating multi-stakeholder meetings. The Policy Summit was a hopeful, vibrant meeting, that brought extraordinary leaders with different skillsets together – often stimulating new partnerships. Having a cohort of Rhodes scholars in residence in the audience, who were studying topics related to global health, created an opportunity for them to see the diverse range of speakers and gain inspiration for developing their own impactful careers in global health. I enjoyed working with the Lifelong Fellowship team at the Rhodes Trust, who were highly experienced and professional in ensuring the smooth running of the event. This format of combining a Policy Summit with a career development opportunity like this Fellowship presents an exciting model for future initiatives.'*

# FOUR IMPACTFUL OUTCOMES OF POLICY SUMMIT AND GLOBAL HEALTH FELLOWSHIP

Six months after the Policy Summit took place, it is evident that this convening had a tangible impact on the field. Here are four highlights.

1

## INFLUENCING THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AGENDA

The Always On approach to pandemic preparedness that was developed at the Policy Summit received significant subsequent interest. A chapter on this topic was commissioned by the World Bank's Disease Control Priorities-4 publication, which is currently under review. Presentations on key findings were also invited by the UK government and the **Independent SAGE advisory committee**. At the Clinton Global Initiative side meeting of the 2023 United Nations High Level meeting in New York, the Global Health Security Consortium convened a meeting with ministers of health of three countries, the World Health Organisation, industry and civil society representatives that continued discussions on the Always On theme and contributed further momentum to develop pilot examples of how this translates to action. At this meeting, Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, announced that the Global Health Security Consortium will conduct pilots using the Always On approach in three countries, with country partners to demonstrate benefit, and is sourcing funding to support these initiatives.



2

## GROWING THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR AN ALWAYS ON APPROACH

There was consensus that the next step should be in-country pilots that would contribute real-world evidence of the Always On approach. Rwanda has pledged support for an exemplar pilot in the country, that looks at translating some of the novel ideas for delivering adult vaccines and linking this with pathogen surveillance in implementation projects. The Global Health Security Consortium have committed to leading the global Always On efforts with dedicated staff time from directors, advisors, managers and associates. Other partners that have committed to supporting this pilot include the Global Health Network, Oxford Nanopore Technology, the Pandemic Action Network, Africa Quantitative Sciences, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and the Clinton Health Access team. The Tony Blair Institute has also committed £150 000 to fund an investment case analysis for this approach.

### 3

## SHAPING NEW COLLABORATIONS ACROSS DISCIPLINARY AND GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES

The Policy Summit led to numerous new collaborations. One example is between Scotland (the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Strathclyde, with support from the Chief Scientist for Health) and Rwanda (the University of Rwanda, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Information Communication Technology and Innovation) in developing a research proposal to evaluate the implementation of an Always On approach to delivering respiratory vaccines to adults. A second example is [this opinion piece](#) that was developed by Nina Acharya (Rhodes scholar-in-residence, Ontario & Somerville 2020), Dave Chokshi (Health Commissioner of New York during the COVID-19 pandemic, Louisiana & Trinity 2003) Mia Malan (Editor of Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, speaker at the Policy Summit) and Helene-Mari van der Westhuizen (Paul Roos Gymnasium & Green Templeton 2018, Rhodes Trust Fellow in Global Health). This was a collaboration that drew on perspectives from the United States, South Africa and the United Kingdom on building trust in pandemic preparedness policy and brought intergenerational learning and mentorship opportunities.

### 4

## STIMULATING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ON THE NEED FOR PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS

The Policy Summit engaged with the public, through pre-Summit polling and excellent media coverage. For example, an opinion piece by [Sir John Bell](#) described the contributions that the Always On approach can make to a public audience. The Policy Summit was featured in [USA Today](#) which has a reach of over 63 million people, and [The Independent](#) with a 21.4 million online monthly audience members. The Policy Summit sessions have been shared on Youtube, with the keynote address by Former Prime Minister Tony Blair receiving more than 5700 views. Prof George Fu Gao, who led China Centres for Disease prevention and Control during the pandemic, made remarks on the [origins of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) which also sparked public interest and debate.



Dr Philip Ma (Saskatchewan & University 1986) in conversation with Prachetas Bhatnagar

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