



Meeting Report

Fifth Meeting of the Panel
17 – 18 March 2021



Report Summary

The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response met virtually for its fifth meeting on the 17 and 18 March 2021.

Opening the meeting, Co-Chair Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf noted that the Panel's fact-finding and analyses were largely complete. She noted that people who are poor, people who are marginalized, and those who have faced structural injustices are at a disadvantage before, during, and after the pandemic, and that the Panel must keep their lives and their voices at the fore when considering its conclusions and recommendations. The Rt Hon Helen Clark noted that the time had come to move forward from fact-findings to draw conclusions and consider recommendations.

The Panel received an analysis of a 28-country in depth review of national responses, and also updated data on the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Key differences were observed between high and low performing countries in their strategies, and which interventions were deployed in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. These were shaped by a range of contextual factors from prior experiences to civil service capabilities, with successful responses observed in centralised and decentralised systems.

The Panel considered what recommendations for a system reset could be. There was agreement that recommendations should be bold, with the aim of preventing future disease outbreaks evolving into pandemics.

The meeting concluded with a presentation of the outline of the final Panel report and outreach and communication strategies. Panel members are committed to work up to and beyond the report launch to ensure that the recommendations are taken up by relevant stakeholders and can catalyse necessary transformative change.

The Independent Panel is scheduled to meet next on 14th-15th April 2021. The final report will be launched the week of 10th May 2021 with subsequent presentation by the co-chairs to the 74th World Health Assembly which begins 24 May 2021.

Report

Background

The Independent Panel was established by the Director-General of the World Health Organization pursuant to World Health Assembly Resolution WHA73.1. In July 2020 the Director-General requested the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Right Honourable Helen Clark, and the former President of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, to be Co-Chairs of the Panel, for which they then selected 11 panellists. The first meeting of the Panel was held on 17 September 2020, the second meeting on 20 – 21 October 2020 and the third meeting on 16-17 December 2020, the fourth meeting 9-10 February 2021. The Panel Co-Chairs presented the interim report of the Panel, the Second Report on Progress, to the meeting of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization on 19 January 2021 (https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Independent-Panel_Second-Reporton-Progress_Final-15-Jan-2021.pdf).

Day 1

Agenda Item 1: Welcome remarks by Co-Chairs

H.E Ellen Johnson Sirleaf welcomed panellists to the 5th Panel Meeting. She noted that the Panel's fact-finding and analyses were largely completed and that the evidence is available on which to base conclusions and recommendations. She highlighted how the pandemic is casting a long shadow of social and economic consequences, noting how the Panel has heard from many people who have been bumped down a rung on the ladder and that there are currently multi-speed recovery pathways with the most vulnerable left in more precarious positions. She noted that people who are poor, people who are marginalized, and those who have faced structural injustices are at a great disadvantage before, during, and will continue to be so after the pandemic, and the panel must keep their lives, and their voices at the heart of their conclusions and recommendations.

The Rt Hon Helen Clark noted that the Panel's mission has been clear: to look at how the pandemic happened and make recommendations that, if implemented would stop another such event happening. She stated that it is now crunch time for the report, and there is a need to formulate clear recommendations for change. The status quo in preparedness and response has had catastrophic consequences. She concluded by thanking the panellists and secretariat for the work they have done so far.

Agenda Item 2: Report of the 4th Panel Meeting

The report of the fourth meeting of the Panel held on 9-10 February 2021 was acknowledged. It was noted that it is published on the Panel's website at: <https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/4thMeeting-Report-fin.pdf>

Agenda Item 3: National and subnational responses

The Panel received a detailed presentation on the preliminary results of an in-depth study of 28 countries, spanning the range between those that experienced high and low mortality from the

pandemic. The study drew on a range of methodologies including literature reviews, national governmental submissions, interviews and round tables with experts. The analysis aimed to identify characteristics of both high and low performing responses to enable the panel to make recommendations to national governments.

The Panel considered an analytical framework for understanding responses based on the approach, strategy, and interventions deployed by different governments, as well wider contextual factors. Key themes emerging included the value of prior experiences, leadership, and agile civil services to enable timely public health interventions. It was noted that all types of governments, both highly centralised and decentralised, were able to achieve aggressive containment of the pandemic. Common features identified for countries with high mortality included a tendency for leaders to devalue public health and/or deny social and economic supports, delay the response, and distrust science. By contrast, those with low mortality had, variously, whole-of-government approaches and effective leadership, coordination of health delivery services, applied learnings from previous outbreaks, and demonstrated trust in scientific advice.

The Panel expressed interest in the extent to which national responses were shaped by their decision/failure to honour international commitments, how WHO guidance influenced decision making at the national level, and to what extent learning between countries, particularly South to South, took place.

Agenda Item 4: The socioeconomic costs and impacts

The Secretariat presented to the panel analysis on the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. Estimates from the IMF estimate that from 2020-21 the global loss of GDP from the pandemic could be around \$9 trillion USD, and that projected cumulative lost economic output from 2020 to 2025 could total up to \$22 trillion USD. The presentation highlighted that between 88 and 115 million people could have been pushed back into extreme poverty, that the impacts were felt greatest by those in the informal and service sectors as well as the most marginalised in populations.

The presentation also highlighted the impact on education - at the high point of the pandemic in 2020, almost 1.6 billion children of school age were not in school. The panel noted with alarm the gendered nature of the impact of the pandemic with more men dying from COVID-19, but more women and female-headed households facing loss of incomes and livelihoods and the increase in reports of gender-based violence.

Reflecting on these stark facts, panellists noted that there was an urgent need to invest billions to save trillions in economic and human losses. There was agreement on the importance of investing in social protection systems to protect families and workers from this and future pandemics.

Agenda Item 5: Areas and options for recommendations – initial discussion

The Panel discussed an initial set of options for recommendations. These recommendations were aimed to respond to three broad problems: health risks have not been seen as global threats, too many countries were unprepared, and the international system failed to function as a system. Initial recommendations were in turn aimed at elevating health threats to the highest levels of decision

making; ensuring that all countries are prepared, resourced, and accountable, and rebuilding an international system that works as a system.

The Panel members felt that recommendations needed to be bold and clear, with a clear goal that if they are implemented that they should prevent a future pandemic, and should there be a pandemic, that they prevent global societal and economic crisis. They also stressed the need for the recommendations to convey a clear sense of urgency – that this is Chernobyl-like moment.

Agenda Item 6: Summary of the day

The Rt Hon Helen Clark concluded the day by thanking the panellists and secretariat staff for their hard work and the helpful opening and framing comments.

Day 2

Agenda Item 7: Recap of Day 1

The previous day's discussions were recapped by the Rt Hon Helen Clark. She emphasised that the whole panel wants strong recommendations based on the evidence gathered and diagnoses flowing from that. These recommendations should build upon the tone and ambition of the interim report. They should command attention, and be clear in what needs to be done, by whom, and when.

Agenda Item 8: Areas and Options for recommendations – continued discussion

A reworked version of the recommendations was presented based on feedback from day 1. The set of options for recommendations were derived from the failures in responding to the current pandemic: countries were not prepared; detection and alert systems did not have the desired reaction; the outbreak became a pandemic which in turn became a social and economic crisis. A reset must enable all countries to prepare to respond as the best performers have this time and prevent outbreaks from becoming the next pandemic.

Panel members reviewed options for system recommendations focussed on moving decision making to the highest levels, including WHO, and ensuring a fit for purpose international financing system for preparedness and response. Panel members noted that recommendations could build on those of the High-level Panel chaired by President Kikwete which reported in 2016, and that this moment is one when Heads of State and Government might be persuaded to invest in and create effective preparedness and response structures and mechanisms.

The Secretariat was requested to work with panel members in the coming weeks to refine the recommendations further.

Agenda Item 9: The outline of the May Report

Panel members were presented with an outline of the structure of the Panel's May report by the Secretariat. Some key points were made about the narrative and ensuring that it both emphasises the need to combat the current pandemic more decisively and makes recommendations for the future. The

Secretariat provided updates regarding the timeline for completing each stage of the report and when panel members can expect to receive a first draft of the complete report.

Agenda Item 10: Outreach and communications

The Panel was briefed on plans for outreach for its work up to and beyond the launch of the report. Panel members agreed to make themselves available for outreach to ensure uptake of their recommendations. There was an emphasis on reaching out beyond the traditional actors and identifying champions for the report's findings.

The Secretariat also updated Panel members on communications plans for the launch of the main report, as well as the background scientific papers.

Agenda Item 11: Reflections on the meeting and concluding remarks

H.E President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf concluded the meeting by thanking the Panel members for a robust exchange of views and guidance over the past few days. She noted the need to put national and subnational systems in charge of pandemic preparedness whilst emphasising their connectedness to regional and international systems. She emphasised the need for fit for purpose global financing instruments which support regional and national mechanisms. There is a need for equity for preparedness as well as response and she emphasised the need to continue to build capacities for preparedness across countries. She ended by stressing how the pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities, and that this was a clarion call for universal social protection to ameliorate the impact of the pandemic now and to be better prepared at all levels of the system, national and international.

Meeting Agenda

Wednesday 17 March

12.00 – 12.10	Welcome remarks by co-chairs and introduction into the agenda
12.10 - 12.15	Report of the 4 th Panel meeting
12.15 – 13.00	National and subnational responses
13.00 – 13.40	The socio-economic costs and impact
13.40 – 14.20	Areas and Options for recommendations – initial discussion
14.30 – 14.30	Summary of the day

Thursday 18 March

12.00 – 12.10	Recap of Day 1
12.10 – 13.00	Areas and Options for recommendations – continued discussion
13.10 - 13.50	The overall outline of the May report
13.50 - 14.20	Outreach and communications
14.20 - 14.30	Reflections on the meeting, conclusions and next Panel meeting

List of Participants

Co-Chairs

HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Rt Hon. Helen Clark

Panel Members

Mauricio Cárdenas
Mark Dybul
Michel Kazatchkine
Joanne Liu
Precious Matsoso
David Miliband
Thoraya Obaïd
Preeti Sudan
Ernesto Zedillo,
Zhong Nanshan

Secretariat

Anders Nordström
Salma Abdalla
Michael Bartos
Michael Dumiak
Mathias Bonk
Celeste Canlas
Mike Kalmus Elias
Marjon Kamara
Helena Legido-Quigley
Shun Mabuchi
Christine McNab
Rosemary McCarney
Alexandra Phelan

Advisors

Sudhvir Singh, Advisor to Rt Hon. Helen Clark
George Kronnisanyon Werner, Advisor and Coordinator to HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Apologies

Aya Chebbi