

Method of work of the governing bodies

Report by the Secretariat

1. During the 125th session of the Executive Board, members expressed satisfaction at the short duration and efficient conduct of the Sixty-second World Health Assembly and of that session of the Board.¹ There was interest in applying that experience to future Health Assemblies and sessions of the Board. Members noted the advantages of disciplined timekeeping, focused debate and shorter format, and that those advantages were in part achieved through the postponement by the Sixty-second World Health Assembly of 11 agenda items to either the 126th session of the Board or the Sixty-third World Health Assembly.

2. The Board requested the Secretariat to review the working methods of the Health Assembly and the Board.² This report contains a number of proposals to facilitate disciplined timekeeping and better agenda management. In addition it suggests potential benefits that could be achieved through other efficiency measures such as harmonization of the Rules of Procedure of the Board with those of the Health Assembly, and taking advantage of new technologies with respect to production of official records.

PROPOSED APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING TIMEKEEPING

World Health Assembly

3. The Board is invited to consider the following possible approaches to limiting the time allotted for interventions during the World Health Assembly.

In Plenary:

4. It is proposed that the List of Speakers for the debate on the Address by the Director-General under agenda item 3 be closed by the end of the first day. The list order would be strictly adhered to, passing to the next speaker if a delegation is not present in the room when it is their turn to speak. Barring extraordinary circumstances, the delegation concerned would not be added to the list for a later time. The purpose of this step would be to bring an earlier conclusion to the general discussion and consequently advance the start of the work of Committee B.

¹ See document EB125/2009/REC/1, summary record of the first meeting, section 3.

² See document EB125/2009/REC/1, summary record of the second meeting, section 2.

5. The Health Assembly customarily agrees to limit the duration of statements during the debate on the Address by the Director-General under item 3 to five minutes, or 10 minutes for group statements. (As a rough guide, to allow for optimum interpretation, a five-minute speech would contain approximately 500 words, and a ten-minute speech 1000.) This reflects Rule 55 of the Rules of Procedure which states that “The Health Assembly may limit the time allowed to each speaker”. The President of the Health Assembly may decide to ensure more rigorously that the Member States keep to their allotted time.

6. It is further proposed that Member States be strongly encouraged to consolidate statements, in line with the guidance provided in resolution WHA46.11, which, *inter alia*, “invites all Member States to consider, at country and regional levels, contributing to joint statements in plenary on behalf of countries in an appropriate grouping, instead of their delegates presenting individual country statements”. This would be effective only if no other country from that group took the floor on the same agenda item or, if it were agreed that members of that group be allotted a shorter time (e.g. three minutes) for their interventions.

In Committee:

7. The Chairmen of the main Committees could be encouraged to direct the discussions more actively, systematically proposing that the Committees limit the time allotted to speakers in accordance with Rule 55 of the Rules of Procedure, e.g. to three minutes for general statements on substantive items (with five minutes for group statements), and rigorously enforcing those limits.

8. If necessary, the “traffic light” system used for the general discussion in Plenary, could also be used in the Committees.¹ As in Plenary, group statements would be strongly encouraged, with no other country from the group taking the floor or, if they must take the floor, only for a very limited time (e.g. two minutes). This proposal would apply to the general discussion of an item, not to the consideration of a draft resolution. Member States would be encouraged to focus discussion on debating the technical and policy aspects of agenda items with the aim of reaching a consensus conclusion rather than presenting statements on the situation in individual countries.

9. The speaking time for observers could be more restricted, and group statements could be encouraged, in particular for nongovernmental organizations.

Executive Board

10. The proposals above relating to careful management of time allowed for statements apply equally, *mutatis mutandis*, to the working methods of the Board. The same benefits would be gained by focusing the debate on the substance of the item under discussion, by limiting the time available to speakers and by encouraging group statements. Progress reports could be considered by the Board as a whole at an evening meeting at an appropriate time during its January session.

¹ This system uses lights to provide timekeeping guidance to a speaker: green indicates “more than one minute remaining”, amber indicates “one minute remaining”, and red indicates “time expired”.

MEASURES RELATING TO AGENDA MANAGEMENT

General: rationalization of reporting requirements

11. The draft provisional agendas of the governing bodies are drawn up initially on the basis of reporting requirements mandated by previous resolutions, with additional items included in accordance with Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board and Rule 12 of the Health Assembly's Rules of Procedure. In recent years, Member States have worked to focus the agendas by using more consistent language in the paragraphs of resolutions which request action by the Director-General.

12. In resolution EB121.R1 the Board has provided clear guidance on the need to define reporting parameters. It decided "... to review resolutions introduced during sessions of the Board with a view to ensuring that they contain a realistic time limit for validity, an appropriate provision for review, follow up and reporting on implementation, that they are concise, focused and action oriented, and that policy, programmatic and financial implications are taken into account, including reference to the Medium-term strategic plan".¹

Proposal for division of labour between the January and May sessions of the Board

13. As in the last two years, the May session of the Executive Board could be limited to one day. The agenda for the May session could comprise the customary report on the outcome of the Health Assembly as well as administrative matters such as the election of officers, appointment of the members of Board Committees, and agreement on dates of the following sessions of the Board and Health Assembly. As far as possible, in the interests of a shortened agenda and session, no technical and health matters would be taken up for substantive discussion.

14. The Secretariat would continue to provide an informal briefing on practical matters to new Board members during the May session.

HARMONIZING THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY AND THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

15. The Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board lack some of the provisions of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, in particular with regard to conduct of business. Existing gaps in the Rules of the Board may, therefore, generate uncertainty and confusion during the Board's proceedings.

16. In view of the foregoing, the Board may wish to consider the following amendments to its Rules of Procedure so as to align them more closely with the corresponding Rules of the Health Assembly. Specific textual proposals are provided in the Annex to the present report:

¹ This provision is also in keeping with an earlier Health Assembly resolution WHA47.14, which stipulates that: "the Chairman of the Executive Board, supported by the Director-General ...[shall] help to ensure that, when appropriate, draft resolutions that are first introduced in the Board clearly set out a realistic time-limit for validity of the resolution and an appropriate mechanism and interval for following up and reporting on implementation; ...".

- the right of reply (Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly);
- the right of Members to make explanations of vote after the adoption of a decision (Rule 75 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly);
- the requirement that, in an election, Members vote for that number of candidates equal to the number of places to be filled (Rule 81 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly);
- a residual provision to overcome the inability of the Board to fill one or more elective places during an election by reason of an equal number of votes received by two or more candidates (Rule 82 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly).¹

USE OF AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO GOVERNING BODY DOCUMENTATION

17. The Secretariat is taking measures within the Rules of Procedure of both the Health Assembly and the Board to facilitate access to pre-session documents and the official records of meetings. Certain steps to make greater use of the Governance pages on the WHO web site, to increase speed of access to documents and to modernize the presentation of the verbatim record of the plenary session of the Health Assembly are proposed.

Pre-session documentation

18. All documents, translated into all official languages, are currently uploaded to the Governance pages on the WHO web site as soon as they are ready for print. To encourage the maximum uptake through this, the most efficient form of delivery, the WHO Secretariat could send an automated e-mail alert to all missions, WHO Representatives, and regional and country offices when new documents are posted. Many Member States are already using this form of access to receive their pre-session documentation. This presents clear opportunities for improved communication and the rationalization of costs related to print and dispatch.

19. The Board may wish to consider a minimized dispatch (a single copy of each document in the appropriate languages to the designated principal recipient in each Member State, as per the official list of addresses). Sets of documents would still be provided for Member States at each session. Any Member State experiencing difficulty in accessing documents electronically would be sent documents in the normal way, upon request.

¹ This situation would materialize, for example, in case no candidate obtains a majority in the first ballot of an election to one elective place and three candidates receive an equal number of votes. Since Rule 50 provides that the second ballot will be limited to the two candidates obtaining the largest number of votes, that Rule would not be applicable since there are three candidates with the largest number of votes, and the Board would run into procedural problems without a residual rule such as the one proposed in this report.

Post-session documentation (official records)

20. The public plenary meetings of the Health Assembly will be digitally recorded and made available to Member States as soon as possible after the close of the session. Each intervention will be recorded and published in the language of original delivery.
21. The Board may wish to advise on the suitability of taking steps to modernize the verbatim record using an audio version of proceedings.
22. No change is proposed to the preparation of the summary record.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

23. The Board is requested to consider the report and provide guidance in particular on the proposed measures to improve the method of work of the governing bodies contained within the following paragraphs:
- measures to support time-saving and efficiency in paragraphs 4–9 (Health Assembly) and paragraph 10 (Board);
 - measures for agenda management in paragraphs 11 and 12;
 - use of technology to enhance access to governing body documentation in paragraphs 19 and 21.
24. The Board is further requested to consider the following draft resolution, with regard to amendments to its Rules of Procedure, as described in paragraphs 15 and 16 of this document:

Method of work of the Executive Board

The Executive Board,

Having considered the report on the method of work of the governing bodies,¹

DECIDES to amend its Rules of Procedure as proposed in the Annex to the report on the method of work of the governing bodies, with effect from the closure of its 127th session.

¹ Document EB126/26.

ANNEX

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

New Rule 30 bis

The right of reply shall be accorded by the Chairman to any member who requests it. Members should, in exercising this right, attempt to be as brief as possible and preferably deliver their statements at the end of the meeting at which this right is requested.

New Rule 47 bis

After the voting has been completed, a member may make a brief statement, consisting solely of an explanation of vote. A sponsor of a proposal shall not speak in explanation of vote thereon, except if it has been amended.

New Rule 51 bis

In an election each member, unless he abstains, shall vote for that number of candidates equal to the number of elective places to be filled. Any ballot paper on which there are more or fewer names than there are elective places to be filled shall be null and void.

New Rule 51 ter

If during an election one or more elective places cannot be filled by reason of an equal number of votes having been obtained by two or more candidates, a ballot shall be held among such candidates to determine which of them will be elected. This procedure may be repeated if necessary.

= = =