

Governance reform: follow-up to decision WHA69(8) (2016)

Report by the Secretariat

1. In May 2016, on the basis of the agreed recommendations of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Meeting on Governance Reform (Geneva, 8 and 9 March 2016 and 28 and 29 April 2016), the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly adopted decision WHA69(8) (2016). In the decision, inter alia, the Officers of the Executive Board, the Director-General, Regional Directors were requested and regional committees invited to undertake a number of actions regarding the methods of work of WHO governing bodies and improvement of the alignment of governance at the three levels of the Organization. In this regard, the following actions have been taken.
2. The Secretariat has developed a draft six-year forward-looking planning schedule of expected agenda items for the Board, including its standing committees and the Health Assembly, and has submitted it as an information document to the Board at its 140th session.¹
3. The Officers of the Board have reviewed the criteria for the inclusion of items on the provisional agenda of the Board and developed proposals for new and/or revised criteria for the consideration of the Board at its 140th session.²
4. The Secretariat, in consultation with Member States and taking into account previous Member State discussions, has developed proposals to improve the level of correspondence between the number of items on the provisional agendas of meetings of the governing bodies and the number, length and timing of their sessions. The proposals are attached in the Annex.
5. The Secretariat has started to analyse the current Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization and Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly in order to identify possible interpretational ambiguities and gaps in the processes for the inclusion of additional, supplementary and urgent agenda items, with a view to making recommendations on the further improvement of those processes. The recommendations will be presented to the Seventy-first World Health Assembly through the Board in 2018.
6. The Secretariat is exploring ways to continue: strengthening and making more user-friendly the use of existing and new information technology tools in order to improve timely and cost-effective access to meetings of the governing bodies and documentation; and making arrangements for access to

¹ Document EB140/INF./3.

² Document EB140/40; and document EB140/40 Add.1.

webcasts post-session of public meetings of the governing bodies. In this regard, the Director-General has made arrangements for webcasts to remain on the WHO website for 90 days after the meetings of the governing bodies. In addition, the Secretariat is developing systems to send invitations electronically to meetings of the governing bodies.

7. In order to strengthen organizational accountability and leadership at senior level, the Director-General has established regular engagement of WHO's Global Policy Group, comprising the Director-General, Deputy Director-General and Regional Directors. This top-level leadership body of the Secretariat, which has averaged four formal meetings annually over the past seven years, has instituted a strengthened culture of corporate management informed by collective decision-making and enhanced organizational stewardship. This strengthened Organization-wide coherence has improved focus on key strategic, programmatic and managerial issues of relevance or risk to the Organization. This was done to enhance convergence of WHO's activities across major offices towards delivery of common results, and to ensure harmonization and integration of senior-level decisions into relevant managerial and coordination structures. Summary reports of meetings of the Global Policy Group are now available on the WHO website.

8. The Secretariat has made the delegations of authority and letters of representation publicly available on the WHO webpages dedicated to the Regional Directors.¹

9. As regards the process of nomination of Regional Directors, the Regional Committee for South-East Asia at its sixty-ninth session decided to set up a working group comprising Member States of the South-East Asia Region to review the measures adopted by the other regional offices and regional committees in aligning the process of nomination of the Regional Director, such as introducing a code of conduct for their nomination, a standardized curriculum vitae and candidates' forum.² The findings of this working group will be presented to the Regional Committee at its seventieth session for its consideration. The Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean at its sixty-third session adopted a code of conduct for the nomination of the Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.³

10. The Director-General and Regional Directors will continue strengthening the implementation of planning mechanisms, such as category networks and the results chain, that improve alignment across the three levels of the Organization.

11. The Secretariat will report, in the context of reporting on WHO reform, on implementation of operative paragraph 4 of decision WHA65(9) on WHO reform, which provides for specific mechanisms to ensure alignment between the regional committees and the Board, for further consideration by the governing bodies.

12. Regional committees were invited to consider reviewing their current practices, including those of their standing committees and subcommittees, where applicable, to strengthen their oversight functions. They were further invited to identify best practices to strengthen WHO cooperation with countries. The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific at its sixty-seventh session considered a review of standing committees and oversight of the work of country offices as part of the review on the process of determining agenda items of sessions of the Regional Committee for the Western

¹ See http://www.who.int/dg/regional_directors/en/ (accessed 16 December 2016).

² See decision SEA/RC69(1) (2016).

³ See resolution EM/RC63/R.6 (2016).

Pacific.¹ Furthermore, the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean at its sixty-third session was informed that, with effect from 2017, the Regional Director will provide at the end of each biennium a consolidated report on the results achieved in the regional and country offices, along with associated financial information to the Regional Committee.² At the same session, the Regional Committee also established a Programme Subcommittee of the Regional Committee and its terms of reference to strengthen the work, performance and oversight functions.³

13. The Secretariat has provided the 2015 WHO country presence report to the Board and its Programme, Budget and Administration Committee.⁴ The Secretariat has begun to prepare, in consultation with country offices, the 2017 WHO country presence report, which will be made available to regional committees for review.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

14. The Board is invited to note the report and provide guidance on the proposals contained in the Annex.

¹ See document WPR/RC67/11, page 2 and Annex 3.

² See document EM/RC63/8 Rev. 1, paragraph 46.

³ See document EM/RC63/8 Rev. 1, paragraph 17.

⁴ See document EB140/INF./2.

ANNEX

GOVERNANCE REFORM: FOLLOW-UP TO DECISION WHA69(8) (2016)

PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE THE LEVEL OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF ITEMS ON THE PROVISIONAL AGENDAS OF MEETINGS OF THE GOVERNING BODIES AND THE NUMBER, LENGTH AND TIMING OF SESSIONS

1. Since 2011, in the context of deliberations on governance reform, Member States have considered proposals on agenda management, as well as on the length, timing and sequencing of meetings of the governing bodies. Such proposals have related to the application of criteria by the Officers of the Board in assessing proposals for the provisional agenda of the Board,¹ the proposed revised process for the agendas of the Board and the Health Assembly,² and the management of agenda items for the Health Assembly's provisional agenda.³ With regard to the scheduling of meetings of the governing bodies, proposals that have been considered include holding an additional session of the Board each year,⁴ increasing the interval between the meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and the Board session⁵ and moving both the January meeting of the Committee and the Board session together to early February.⁶
2. Following these discussions, the governing bodies made several decisions regarding agenda management,⁷ such as incorporating the categories for priority setting in the draft Twelfth General Programme of Work 2014–2019 into the criteria for inclusion of additional items on the provisional agenda.⁸ With respect to the scheduling of meetings, the governing bodies decided to keep the current cycle.
3. The Open-ended Intergovernmental Meeting on Governance Reform revisited the issues of agenda management and scheduling of meetings of governing bodies when it met in March and April 2016 and agreed on a set of 15 recommendations to the Health Assembly. The recommendations, set out in document A69/5, were considered by the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly, which adopted decision WHA69(8).

¹ See document EB132/5 Add.3, paragraph 22–24; document EB133/3, paragraphs 5–17; document EB134/6, paragraphs 20–25; and document EB136/6, paragraphs 4 and 5.

² See document EB134/6, paragraphs 28–30.

³ See document EB132/5 Add.3, paragraphs 25–30.

⁴ See document EBSS/2/2, paragraph 63(1).

⁵ See document EB130/5 Add.3, paragraph 2.9; and document A65/5, paragraphs 18 and 19.

⁶ See document A65/5 paragraph 19.

⁷ See decision WHA65(9) (2012); decision EB134(3) (2014); and resolution WHA67.2 (2014).

⁸ In decision WHA65(9) paragraph 7(a), the Health Assembly decided that the Officers of the Board should use criteria, including those for priority setting in the draft general programme of work, in reviewing items for inclusion on the Board's agenda, namely the current health situation, needs of individual countries, internationally agreed instructions, the existence of evidence-based, cost-effective interventions and the strengths of WHO.

4. Decision WHA69(8) requested the Director-General, in consultation with Member States and taking into account previous Member State discussions, to develop by the end of October 2016 proposals to improve the level of correspondence between the number of items on the provisional agendas of governing bodies meetings and the number, length and timing of the sessions, including the financial implications of proposed options, for consideration by the Seventieth World Health Assembly through the Board at its 140th session.

5. In this regard, the Secretariat held an electronic consultation open to all Member States from 11 to 28 October 2016, and received comments from 26 Member States and one regional group on a set of draft proposals presented for purposes of the consultation.¹ The comments have been taken into consideration in the reformulation of the proposals contained in this document.

6. There are two categories of proposals for improving the level of correspondence between the number of items on the provisional agendas of governing bodies meetings and the number, length and timing of the sessions: reduce the number and promote an orderly consideration of agenda items; and improve the efficiency of the meetings. With respect to the financial implications of the proposed options, current resources could potentially be reallocated to cover associated costs.

(A) REDUCE THE NUMBER AND PROMOTE AN ORDERLY CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

7. The large number of items on the provisional agendas of governing bodies meetings pose several challenges: for delegations preparing to participate in substantial discussions; for governing bodies trying to cover all of the items within the number of days allotted and within normal working hours, while focusing their work on WHO's strategic priorities; and for the Secretariat in preparing and making available all the documentation in the six official languages of the Organization. The large number of items poses particular problems during six-day January sessions of the Board, when evening sessions are usually required for the Board to complete its work. When the average number of items per day is greater than six, evening sessions are usually required (Table).

Table. January sessions of the Board, 2008–2016

Session of the Board	Year	Length of meeting in days	Number of evening sessions needed	Number of agenda items, including sub-items	Average number of items per day	Number of pages of pre-session documentation
122	2008	6	0 ^a	40	7	347
124	2009	8	0	46	6	441
126	2010	6	2	51	9	394
128	2011	8	0	49	6	600
130	2012	6	1	55	9	442
132	2013	8	2	60	8	805
134	2014	6	3	68	11	650
136 ^b	2015	8	0	49	6	624
138	2016	6	2	54	9	679

^a No evening sessions were held, but an afternoon session was extended until 19:15.

^b Beginning in January 2015, there was a decrease in the number of agenda items as a result of resolution WHA67.2 (2014), in which the Health Assembly decided that progress reports will be considered by the Health Assembly only.

¹ See <http://apps.who.int/gb/consult/> (accessed 16 December 2016).

Establishing a maximum optimal number of items on provisional agendas of Board sessions

8. The Board may wish to consider recommending a maximum optimal number of items, which the Secretariat should take into account when preparing the draft provisional agenda of the Board session in accordance with Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization. This number would also guide the Officers of the Board and the Director-General when drawing up the provisional agenda under the same rule.
9. The maximum optimal number of items would be without prejudice to the Board's prerogative to exceed this number, if the Board considers it necessary.
10. Should this proposal be acceptable, the Board may wish to request the Officers of the Board to propose a maximum optimal number of items to be taken into account, in connection with their proposal concerning criteria for inclusion of items on the provisional agenda of the Board session.¹
11. Should the Board agree to this proposal, it could be implemented on a provisional basis over a three-year period, with effect from the 142nd session of the Board. The Secretariat may report on the implementation of this practice to the Board at its 146th session.

Proposals for introducing requirements concerning the inclusion of items on the provisional agenda of the Health Assembly

12. The provisional agenda of the Health Assembly is prepared each January by the Board, which includes an item on the Board's agenda on the provisional agenda of the Health Assembly and the date and place of the following session of the Board.² According to Rule 5 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, no conditions are placed on the inclusion on the provisional agenda of the Health Assembly of items proposed by Member States and Associate Members, and any organization of the United Nations system, other than the United Nations itself, with which the Organization has entered into effective relations. As a result, any item proposed by those mentioned for the provisional agenda of the Health Assembly is automatically included, regardless of its relevance to the work of WHO, timeliness or any other criteria that could, in principle, be applied.
13. In order to promote more manageable agendas and in light of the benefit arising from the Board's prior consideration of items, the Board may wish to consider making recommendations to the Health Assembly on the introduction of requirements to include new items on the provisional agenda of the Health Assembly by the entities mentioned above. This may include requiring that proposals for the direct inclusion of items on the provisional agenda of the Health Assembly should be accompanied by an explanatory memorandum, analogous to the procedure used to prepare the Board's provisional agenda. The Board may also wish to make recommendations on the process for receiving the explanatory memorandum and the role of such memorandums in the process of approving the provisional agenda of the Health Assembly by the Board.

¹ See document EB140/40; and document EB140/40 Add.1.

² See Constitution of the World Health Organization, Article 28(f); and the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, Rule 4.

(B) IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY OF MEETINGS OF THE GOVERNING BODIES

Maximize the benefits of discussion in the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee

14. The Programme, Budget and Administration Committee meets twice annually, once immediately before the January session of the Board and again immediately before the Health Assembly in May. The terms of reference of the Committee include to review, provide guidance and make recommendations on certain items to the Board, and to act on behalf of the Board in examining and providing advice, comments and recommendations on matters directly to the Health Assembly.¹ In this regard, the Committee discusses and reports on items that are subsequently considered by the Board in January and the Health Assembly in May.

15. To maximize the benefits of the discussion in the Committee, it is recommended that the report of the Committee should be discussed together with the agenda items that are covered by their report. For the agenda of the Board, this would involve moving the item on the report of the Committee down to the section of the agenda that deals with management and administration matters. In addition, items covered by the Committee report could then be discussed in one or more blocks, rather than being taken up individually. Where an item includes a draft resolution or decision, or has been specifically referred to the Committee for consideration, it may require additional time for discussion and be taken up individually.

16. During the Health Assembly, items previously discussed by the Committee may also be taken up in one or more blocks, and be preceded by an oral report by the Chairman of the Committee.

Improve the management of statements

17. In order to improve the work of the governing bodies, time limits have been established for statements to be delivered by delegations. Currently, in both the Board and the main committees of the Health Assembly, three minutes are allotted for statements by delegations and five minutes for regional statements. Such limits are enforced through a “traffic light” system.

18. During the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly, Member States were invited to consider reducing the length of statements during meetings. At the same time, there would also be an opportunity for more complete statements by delegates to be posted on the internet.² The Secretariat proposes to develop further a dedicated webpage where full statements of Member States wishing to deliver abbreviated statements during a meeting may be posted under the relevant agenda item, and in the language of submission, for the duration of the relevant governing body session. There would be no change in the summary records, which would continue to reflect statements as actually delivered by delegations.

19. In addition, it is proposed that the Chairman should be encouraged to use his/her discretion to manage time diligently during the session. In certain instances, this could involve inviting delegations, the Secretariat, observers, intergovernmental organizations and entities in official relations with WHO

¹ See resolution EB131.R2 (2012).

² See <http://apps.who.int/gb/Statements/WHA68/> (accessed 16 December 2016).

to reduce the length of their statements, to two minutes, for example, particularly during discussions where no substantive action is required by the governing body.

20. Furthermore, it is proposed that when discussion is opened on an item, the floor should be given first to delegations providing statements on behalf of their region, who would be allotted five minutes. Should other delegations from the same region subsequently choose to make statements, they would then be allotted two minutes for their statements. In instances where a region elects not to provide a regional statement, delegations from that region would be allotted three minutes for their statements, as per usual practice. In responding to questions and comments from delegations, the Secretariat, with the exception of the Director-General, would similarly be invited to respect the relevant time limits.

21. Finally, the Secretariat proposes to add to the guides on the governing bodies – which are made available to Permanent Missions and Board members – a section dedicated to statements during meetings of the governing bodies, which would urge Member States to keep congratulatory remarks to a minimum, focus statements on the particular action requested by the governing body and post any comments on activities undertaken in countries on the dedicated webpage.

Encourage an early exchange of views on agenda items

22. Additional time may be saved from an early exchange of views on agenda items, allowing any questions and concerns to be raised and addressed before the item is considered by the governing body. Such an exchange may be promoted through the timely delivery of governing body documentation, so as to ensure that delegations have sufficient time to review and discuss the documents. In addition, it is proposed that Member States should be invited to upload their statements on the dedicated webpage in advance of meetings of the governing bodies.

23. Finally, the Secretariat proposes, in the context of mission briefings that precede governing bodies meetings, to provide an overview of the items on the provisional agendas, highlighting specific actions requested by the governing body. In this way, Member States would be encouraged to have a more focused discussion.

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