



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

EXECUTIVE BOARD
103rd Session
Provisional agenda item 4

EB103/8
8 December 1998

Role of the Executive Board

Note by the Chairman

BACKGROUND

1. In her address to the Executive Board at its 102nd session, the Director-General outlined a number of ways in which the Board could engage in change.¹ Many of the issues raised then were pursued during informal discussions at a retreat of Executive Board members held near WHO headquarters from 16 to 18 October 1998. This note by the Chairman of the Board summarizes those discussions.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. In her address to the Board in May 1998, the Director-General expressed the wish to explore “a working relationship between the Secretariat and the knowledge base represented by the Board” and invited the Board “to follow more closely the work of the Secretariat”. This approach to the relationship between the Board and the Secretariat is in line with reform in the functions of the executive boards of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF. United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/162 (1993) defines the new functions of those boards as being, *inter alia*:

- *to receive information from and give guidance to the head of each fund or programme on the work of each organization;*
- *to monitor the performance of the fund or programme;*
- *to encourage and examine new programme initiatives.*

3. The functions of the Executive Board, as established in Article 28 of the Constitution of WHO, relate mainly to its role as executive organ of the Health Assembly. At the retreat, members of the Board suggested that the Board should not only look “up” in the direction of the Health Assembly but should also look “down” in the direction of the Secretariat.

¹ See document EB102/1998/REC/1, pp. 53-56.

AGENDA

4. The structure of the provisional agenda for the 103rd session of the Executive Board has been redesigned to open the way “for real policy discussions” and for those discussions to “be a trademark of political decision shaping and decision making on global health issues between nations” as called for by the Director-General in her address to the Board in May 1998. The papers prepared for the various agenda items are shorter and more focused and the proposed timetable will include the possibility of small group meetings - for briefing and exchange of information outside the formal decision-making meetings - and to allow more time for drafting groups, working groups and other kinds of consultative processes to take place.

NEW MEMBERS

5. In her address to the Board, the Director-General also called for “a means to brief and support the new members as they join the Executive Board each May - to acquaint them with the role, functions, mechanisms and procedures of the Executive Board as well as with the culture of WHO”. This was discussed at the retreat and some of the ideas put forward were:

- a one- or two-day informal briefing session for new members following the May session;
- a mentor system, whereby an experienced member of the Board from the region would act as mentor for a new member during the period between the May and January sessions;
- better sharing of information through an “Executive Board update”.

STANDING COMMITTEE

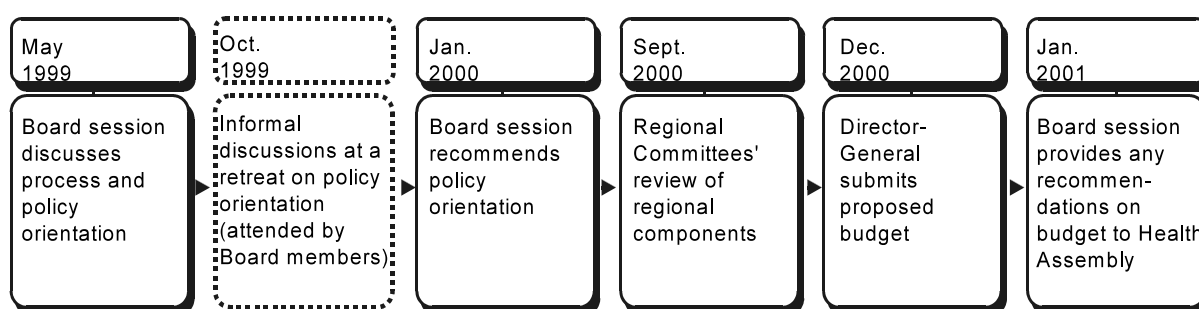
6. The idea of establishing a standing committee was discussed at the retreat. Such a committee could consist of the Chairman, three Vice-Chairmen and two Rapporteurs and would facilitate collaboration with the Secretariat between sessions. Similar executive groups exist at the regional level in varying degrees of formality.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

7. The election of the Chairman of the Board at the January session, prior to assumption of his or her duties at the May session would improve continuity. This would not necessarily conflict with Article 27 of the Constitution, which provides that the Board shall elect its Chairman from among its members, but it would require an amendment to Rule 12 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, which states that “the Board shall elect its officers, viz. a Chairman and three Vice-Chairmen, from among its members each year at its first session after the Health Assembly”. Election of the Chairman in January would mean that those Board members who take up office in May would have no voice in electing their Chairman, while those who leave the Board following the closure of the Health Assembly would participate in electing a Chairman with whom they would not serve.

BUDGETARY RESPONSIBILITIES

8. Article 55 of the Constitution requires the Director-General to prepare and submit to the Board the budget estimates of the Organization. It further requires the Board to consider and submit to the Health Assembly such budget estimates, together with any recommendations the Board may deem advisable. During discussions at the retreat on preparation of the budget, many participants felt that the Board should play a more meaningful role in the budget exercise and should be able to provide input at an earlier stage. In this respect, the matching between regular budget resources and extrabudgetary funding should be brought more to the attention of the Board. The figure below shows a time line for Executive Board participation in the budget process which could be implemented with respect to the proposed budget for 2002-2003.



LINK WITH REGIONAL OFFICES

9. Although many members of the Board participate as representatives to the regional committees, consistent positions on all issues at all levels become even more important at a time of change throughout the Organization. The need for better links between the Board's work and discussions in regional committees continues to be a concern.

INVOLVEMENT OF BOARD MEMBERS IN COMMITTEES

10. The effectiveness of the committees established by the Board - in particular the Programme Development Committee (PDC) and the Administration, Budget and Finance Committee (ABFC) - has also been a concern expressed in the Board. It was the subject of an evaluation exercise carried out in 1997, the result of which is still pending. One idea put forward at the retreat was to divide responsibilities: ABFC might consider matters covered by the general management, external relations and governing bodies clusters, and PDC might consider matters covered by the technical clusters. Another idea put forward was to hold the meetings of PDC and ABFC five to six weeks prior to the Board. One participant at the retreat recalled the proposal to establish a separate audit committee.

11. In relation to the Board's participation in reviewing programme implementation, a proposal was made to consolidate, at cluster level, the meetings of interested parties in connection with specific programmes and to establish a procedure for reporting back to the Executive Board.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

12. The financial implications of changes in methods of work of the Board would need to be made known before any decisions were taken.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

13. The Board should discuss the various points summarized in this paper and, in the light of legal and financial information made available, make recommendations for changes in methods of work, including amendments to the Rules of Procedure where necessary, in order to enhance its role.

= = =