



**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

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**REVIEW OF THE MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE  
PROGRAMME SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Report of the Regional Director**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Paragraphs</b>
BACKGROUND .....	1–6
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES .....	7–10
EXPERIENCES FROM OTHER WHO REGIONS .....	11
PROPOSED NEW TERMS OF REFERENCE.....	12–13
MEMBERSHIP AND MEETINGS.....	14–18
	<b>Page</b>
ANNEX 1: Proposed terms of reference (AFR/RC48/12 Rev. 1) .....	4

## BACKGROUND

1. The WHO Regional Committee for Africa was established in accordance with the Constitution of the World Health Organization<sup>1</sup> which guides the Regional Committee and its work as an integral part of the WHO. The Constitution also guides the interface between the Regional Committee and the work of the Regional Office. Resolution WHA33.17 further elaborated on the relationships.
2. At its twenty-fifth session in September 1975, the WHO Regional Committee for Africa by Resolution AFR/RC25/R10 established the first 12-member Programme Budget Subcommittee. This Subcommittee conducted a preliminary analysis of the 1978-1979 Programme Budget and reported at the twenty-sixth session of the Committee. The duties of the Subcommittee were ephemeral and it was dissolved.
3. In 1977, another 12-member Programme Budget Subcommittee was constituted by Decision 77/8 at the twenty-seventh session of the Regional Committee for a two-year period. The Subcommittee was to examine and analyse the proposed Programme Budget, participate in the Regional programme meetings, and draw the attention of the Regional Committee to questions that required consideration in plenary session.
4. In 1997, at its forty-seventh session, the Regional Committee expressed the need to have a body<sup>2</sup> that would perform a role similar to that of the Executive Board dealing with both technical and managerial issues. At its forty-eighth session, the Regional Committee considered new terms of reference for the Programme Subcommittee contained in working document AFR/RC48/12 Rev. 1 and adopted it with amendments<sup>3</sup> (Annex 1).
5. The Programme Subcommittee as is currently constituted still draws on the stated orientation of the forty-eighth session of the Regional Committee and meets once in a year for a period of four (4) days in the month of June. The orientation of the Regional Committee allows the Subcommittee to meet as often as possible, with the last meeting to be held in June.
6. Current practice, however, differs slightly from originally intended. The membership of the Programme Subcommittee has been increased to twelve (12). At least two serving Member States of the Executive Board and the chairman of the African Advisory Committee on Health Research are invited to participate as observers.

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

7. The Programme Subcommittee has consistently been commended by the Regional Committee for the excellent work it does in reviewing technical documents and programme budgets for the consideration of the Regional Committee. Its reports have been generally considered succinct and informative, and they assist in decision-making.
8. The main challenge is effectively addressing the growing number of agenda items and facilitating decision-making during the sessions of the Regional Committee. The Subcommittee examines the technical accuracy of documents before their submission to the Regional Committee. However, this contribution falls short of providing technical and policy options for

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<sup>1</sup> WHO, *Basic documents*, Forty-fifth edition, pp.11–13, Geneva, World Health Organization, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> WHO, *Forty-seventh session of the Regional Committee for Africa, Final Report*, paragraph 211, Harare, World Health Organization, Regional Office for Africa, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> WHO, *Forty-eighth session of the Regional Committee for Africa, Final Report*, paragraphs 280–281, Harare, World Health Organization, Regional Office for Africa, 1998.

the review and decisions of the ministers of health during Regional Committee deliberations. The effect has been that ministers must review each technical paper in detail before taking decisions.

9. The health environment is also changing, and health ministers are requiring more critical analysis, especially of the more complex public health issues requiring peer review and consensus. The current composition of 12 (twelve) members is inadequate to provide a fair representation of Member States and to address the above mentioned concerns.

10. In view of the above, new terms of reference are necessary for the Subcommittee to enhance its supportive and advisory role vis-a-vis the Regional Committee. This would allow Member States to focus on adoption of resolutions and orientations rather than on the analysis of technical papers.

### **EXPERIENCES FROM OTHER WHO REGIONS**

11. A review of practices and experiences from other WHO Regions informed the drafting of the new proposed terms of reference. The review revealed considerable variety in the membership as well as the mandate of subcommittees. In some instances, a subcommittee serves as a working party of the Regional Committee and supports Member States delegates during all governing bodies meetings. In other instances, the Programme Subcommittee serves as a programme formulation and implementation advisory body to the Regional Director.

### **PROPOSED NEW TERMS OF REFERENCE**

12. According to Rule 16 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Africa, the *Programme Subcommittee* is a subsidiary body of the Regional Committee, established by the latter to study and examine issues to be discussed by the Committee while remaining within the confines of the Regional Committee.

13. The revised functions of the Programme Subcommittee are proposed as follows:

- (a) Review and propose provisional agenda of the Regional Committee to the Regional Director;
- (b) Advise the Regional Director on matters of due importance that require consideration by the Regional Committee;
- (c) Advise the Regional Director on proposed designations of Member States to be considered by the Regional Committee when calls are made for the Region to nominate Member States to serve on councils and committees;
- (d) Examine issues related to the General Programme of Work, Medium-Term Strategic Plan, the global health for all policy and regional health policies before they are considered by the Regional Committee.
- (e) Review the Programme Budget, regional strategies, technical reports and resolutions proposed by the Regional Director:
  - (i) to advise if the analysis and proposals put forward are in conformity with the expectations of Member States as well as regional and international health goals;
  - (ii) to give an opinion as to whether the cost implications and needed funds are realizable within the timeframe proposed;
  - (iii) to find out if an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system has been adequately provided;

- (iv) to include comprehensive advisory notes for the attention of the Regional Committee;
- (f) Recommend to the Regional Committee additional resources required by the Regional Office and propose a mechanism for Member States to contribute with additional funding for the implementation of Regional Committee resolutions;
- (g) Suggest to the Regional Committee such additional work or investigation into health matters as in the opinion of the Programme Subcommittee would promote the mission of the Organization within the Region;
- (h) Undertake any other assignments as may be recommended by the Regional Committee;
- (i) Advise the Regional Director as and when required between sessions of the Regional Committee.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND MEETINGS**

14. The Programme Subcommittee will consist of 16 (sixteen) representatives of Member States. Persons representing the Member States shall be technically competent and in a senior management position with considerable experience in health development. In addition, three members of the Executive Board from the African Region will participate in the Programme Subcommittee meetings. Membership shall be on a rotating basis following the English alphabetical order. No country shall serve simultaneously in the two categories.

15. The Regional Director may invite such persons as may be considered relevant in advancing an understanding of any particular agenda item(s) or technical paper(s) under consideration by the Programme Subcommittee as observers.

16. All members other than the Executive Board members will serve for a two-year period, replacing eight each year according to the English alphabetical order. Members of the Executive Board completing their term will not be eligible to serve on the Programme Subcommittee until at least two years have expired. The order of succession in this case shall pass on to the next Member State in line, alphabetically.

17. A chairperson, vice-chairperson and three rapporteurs representing the three official languages of the Region will be elected from among the non-EB members for a one-year period.

18. The Regional Director will convene the Programme Subcommittee at least once a year for a duration not exceeding five working days, in consultation with the chairman of the Regional Committee.

**ANNEX 1**

**PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE (AFR/RC48/12 Rev.7)**

**“(b) Functions**

- (i) To examine and analyse the proposed biennial programme budget to determine if it:
  - conforms with the General Programme of Work covering a specific period;
  - takes the decisions and recommendations of the Governing Bodies into consideration;
  - and
  - satisfies the priority health needs of Member States.
- (ii) To review, from time to time, regional priorities and strategies in order to ensure that they are in conformity with and supportive of global and country priorities.
- (iii) To examine issues related to the General Programme of Work, the global health-for-all policy, regional policies and managerial matters before they are considered by the Regional Committee.
- (iv) To review the method of work of the Regional Committee and determine ways in which it can be improved.
- (v) To advise the Regional Committee on (i) to (iv) as well as on other issues which, due to their importance, require consideration by the Committee in a plenary session and, at the same time, submit preliminary suggestions to assist it in making its decisions.
- (vi) To counsel the Regional Director as and when appropriate between sessions of the Regional Committee.

**(c) Membership**

Eleven members drawn from the Member States, with partial yearly renewal of membership. This implies that five members will lose their membership in one year and the remaining six in the next year. Replacement of those retiring shall be done on the basis of the English alphabetical order.

**(d) Frequency, period and duration of meetings**

The Subcommittee shall meet at least once a year, but its last meeting shall be held in June. If the meeting is held once a year, its duration shall last up to five days.”