

Note for the Record

Meeting of the Director-General with the Officers of the Executive Board 7 October 2017

Participants

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General
Dr Assad Hafeez (Pakistan) Chair
Mr Philip Davies (Fiji) Vice-Chair
Dr Joselyne Nijimbere (Burundi) Vice-Chair
Ms Sarah Lawley (Canada) Vice-Chair
Dr Viroj Tangcharoensathien (Thailand) Vice-Chair

Unable to attend: Professor Maksut Kulzhanov (Kazakhstan) Rapporteur

Secretariat

Dr Sinait Fisseha, Senior Adviser to the Director-General
Dr Timothy Armstrong, Director Governing Bodies
Mr Steven Solomon, Principal Legal Officer
Ms Gina Vea, External Relations Officer, Governing Bodies
Ms Jane Nicholson, Coordinator Language Services
Ms Laurence Vercammen, Protocol Assistant

Observers

Dr Mahmoud Fikri, Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean
Dr Mohamad Assai, Head of Country Office, Pakistan
Dr Jaouad Mahjour, Director Programme Management, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

1. Purpose of the meeting

The Director-General and the Officers of the Executive Board met in Islamabad, Pakistan on 7 October 2017. The meeting was chaired by the Chairman of the Executive Board.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- review the draft provisional agenda of the 142nd session of the Board to be held in January 2018, in accordance with Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board;
- test the criteria and factors for the prioritization of proposals, to be applied on a trial basis in line with the Board's decision EB141(8) on governance reform, and provide feedback to the Secretariat on use of the prioritization tool;
- update the Officers on the preparations for the special session of the Executive Board; and
- report on the consultation on the methods of work of the governing bodies and the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

2. Provisional agenda of the Executive Board at its 142nd session

At its previous meeting held on 31 July – 1 August 2017, the Officers of the Board (the Bureau) had proposed to restructure the agenda of the 142nd Executive Board according to a new framework under six categories:

- (1) Opening and adoption of the agenda
- (2) Dialogue with the Director-General
- (3) Strategic priority issues: programmatic, governance and managerial
- (4) Other technical issues
- (5) Managerial, administrative and governance issues
- (6) Matters for information

They had proposed that the items on “Eradication of poliomyelitis” and “Progress towards the health-related sustainable development goals” be moved to the draft provisional agenda of the Seventy-first World Health Assembly, which would leave a total of 34 items on the agenda.

The draft provisional agenda had been circulated to Member States on 10 July 2017. Ten proposals for additional agenda items had been made by Member States by the deadline of 21 September. These proposals had been circulated to the Officers in advance of the meeting, together with the accompanying explanatory memoranda and Secretariat briefing notes. The Officers of the Board had also been provided with the tool for prioritization of proposals approved by the Executive Board (EB141(8)) for use on this occasion on a trial basis. It was noted that the Officers of Board were mandated to report back to the Board at its 142nd session on their experience using the prioritization tool.

With respect to the process for considering the 10 proposals, the Chairman proposed that the scores derived from the prioritization tool be distributed following a qualitative and contextual discussion of each proposal. This suggestion followed comments by the Officers that a “robotic” approach should be avoided; that the Officers were only testing the tool and that it should facilitate but not restrict their consideration; that the context of each proposal should be carefully considered; that the purpose of the Executive Board and the existing agenda items should be taken into account; and that the established practice of consensus among the Officers in considering the proposals should be maintained.

The Chairman proposed that, with a view to facilitating the Board’s final determination for the handling of the additional proposals, the Officers consider the following recommendations:

- Option 1: supporting the inclusion of the proposal in the agenda
- Option 2: combining with another agenda item
- Option 3: deferring to a future session of the Executive Board
- Option 4: deferring to the World Health Assembly
- Option 5: not including the proposal, if circumstances warrant.

The Vice Chair from Fiji offered to withdraw himself from discussion of the item proposed by his country. The Bureau noted the offer but did not consider it necessary given the practices of the Officers in such situations and the desire to avoid setting a precedent that might complicate proposals coming from countries being represented among the Officers.

The Officers noted that they had all faced challenges in applying the prioritization tool and therefore, for reasons of expediency, agreed to discuss their experience with the tool for purposes of preparing their report to the Executive Board at a later time. See also section 3 of this note for the record.

New agenda items

With regard to proposals for additional agenda items received from Member States, the Officers of the Executive Board recommended:

- **to support for inclusion in** the provisional agenda of the **142nd session of the Executive Board**, under Strategic priority issues, the item proposed by the Government of the Russian Federation on tuberculosis and to recommend that the title of the proposal “Implementation of the commitments of the First WHO Ministerial Conference on ending tuberculosis in the sustainable development era: a multisectoral response” be amended to “Preparation for the United Nations High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on Ending Tuberculosis”, to be held in 2018, thereby broadening the scope of the agenda item.
- **to defer** the item on “Global action on patient safety” proposed by the Government of the United Kingdom **to a future session of the Executive Board**, following discussion of “World health days” at a future session of the Board as well as conclusion of the process to approve the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW) by the Seventy-first World Health Assembly, since patient safety would be expected to be an important element of discussions on the GPW in relation to universal health coverage.
- **to defer** the item on “Engagement framework for private sector in health care delivery towards universal health coverage” proposed by the Government of the Philippines, **to a future session of the Executive Board**, pending the outcome of the ongoing work and approval of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work.
- **not including** on the provisional agenda of the **142nd session of the Executive Board** the item on workers’ health proposed by the Governments of Sri Lanka and the United Republic of Tanzania under proposals entitled, respectively, “Follow-up of resolution WHA60.26 Workers’ Health: Global Plan of Action in the context of the SDG” and “Workers’ Health: Follow-up of the WHO global plan of action beyond 2008-2017”, noting that a progress report on implementation of the global plan of action on workers’ health 2008–2017 would be presented to all Member States at the Seventy-first World Health Assembly in 2018 in accordance with WHA60.26.
- **not including** on the provisional agenda of the **142nd session of the Executive Board** the item on “Accelerated action for global drowning prevention” proposed by the Government of Fiji and drawing the attention of the Director-General to the need to enhance advocacy at country level in this area and raise awareness of existing guidance on prevention of drowning.
- **not including** on the provisional agenda of the **142nd session of the Executive Board** the item on World Chagas Disease Day proposed by the Government of Brazil noting concern about a proliferation of specialized health “days” and the need for a comprehensive consideration by Member States of the costs and benefits of such “days”. The officers considered it appropriate to include such a consideration at a future session of the Board under Managerial, administrative and governance issues, and requested the Secretariat to prepare an analysis of the matter, including a mapping of world days/weeks and an evaluation of their effectiveness.
- **not including** on the provisional agenda of the **142nd session of the Executive Board** the item on “establishment of a World Food Safety Day”, based on the same concern. However, noting the conclusion of the Codex Alimentarius Commission on the establishment of a World Food Safety Day and FAO resolution 11/2017 on observance of World Food Safety Day, the Officers of the Executive Board recommended that the Director-General send an official communication to the Director-General of FAO supporting the transmission of that FAO resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

- **not including** on the provisional agenda of the **142nd session of the Executive Board** the item on “Role of regional cooperation in the regulatory reforms for NCD prevention and control” proposed by the Government of the Philippines, given that noncommunicable diseases was already on the agenda.
- **not including** on the provisional agenda of the **142nd session of the Executive Board** the item on “Health and human resources” proposed by the Government of the Philippines as the issue has been discussed recently under Working for Health: A Five-Year Action Plan for Health Employment and Inclusive Economic Growth 2017-2021 adopted in May 2017 in the Seventieth World Health Assembly, that discussions will continue at the 4th Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, in November 2017, and that the proposal has a regional, not global focus ; and invite the Members of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific to consider, if appropriate, including this item in the agenda of their next regional committee meeting.

Other items

The Officers of the Board noted that at their previous meeting they had proposed that Polio transition planning be included in the agenda as a strategic priority issue and that polio eradication be moved to the agenda of the WHA71. However, they agreed to the proposal of the Secretariat to include the **report on polio eradication**, which had already been prepared, as a document for information.

They further recommended that the existing item on “Preparation for the third High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of NCDs”, to be held in 2018, should be considered under Strategic priority issues.

Next steps

In response to the request of the Officers of the Board, the Director for Governing Bodies confirmed that guidance materials would be developed to help Member States prepare future proposals for additional agenda items in a more consistent manner. Such guidance should include high-level comments from WHO on the proposals, rather than just comments from the concerned technical programme; these should include whether the issue has been discussed before, existing resolutions/decisions, and the impact on WHO from a resource perspective.

In accordance with Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure, where the Director-General and the Officers found it necessary to recommend the deferral or exclusion of proposals received for the draft provisional agenda of the 142nd session of the Board, an explanation for such recommendation, would be reflected in the annotated provisional agenda. In accordance with decision EB134(3) on WHO reform: methods of work of the governing bodies, the explanatory memoranda and supporting statements would be made available on the WHO web-based platform to all Member States and Associate Members.

The Director-General informed the Officers of the Board that the annotated provisional agenda for the 142nd session of the Executive Board as well as the provisional agenda showing the document numbers, would be sent out to all Member States with the convocation letter.

3. Use of the prioritization tool

The preliminary outcome of the trial scoring of the proposals for additional agenda items was shared with the Officers of the Board. (The final outcome, including the scores of the one officer not able to be present at the meeting, was shared with the Officers shortly after the meeting.) It was noted that there was general concordance with the outcome of the discussion on the provisional agenda. Noting that the final totals would be included in the report of the

Secretariat to the Executive Board on the trial, the Officers recommended that the scores be represented as percentages rather than totals.

The Officers made a number of preliminary comments on their experience in use of the tool. They noted the utility of a scoring system in principle, but found challenges in applying it as a purely quantitative measure. It was a complex tool with a number of negative indicators that could confuse scoring. Certain factors seemed repetitive, and the wide and varying range of possible scores for each factor complicated the analysis. In sum, and as would be elaborated fully in their report, the Officers felt a simplified system, with fewer criteria, would better assist future officers. The Officers suggested that the tool be reviewed and revised by the WHO evaluation department, and noted this recommendation would be included in their report.

The Chair invited the Officers to send their detailed comments on use of the tool, including its various sections, to the Secretariat and suggested the Officers meet on the margins of the special session of the Executive Board in November to consider their report on this matter so that it may be submitted to the Board in January 2018.

4. Proposals on improving the methods of work of the Executive Board

The representative of the Legal Counsel outlined the consultation process to date on Modalities and methods of work of the Executive Board and Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board and World Health Assembly. He noted that a consultation document addressing the different mandates in these areas had been disseminated to Member States in August to inform a consultation process. (The consultation document is available online at <http://apps.who.int/gb/CONSULT-Rules/index.html>) An online consultation had taken place over 3 weeks while a face-to-face consultation, which was webcast for Member States not present in Geneva, had been held on 21 September in Geneva.

Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board

The Executive Board had requested (EB141(8)) “that the Secretariat’s analysis of current Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board and Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly in respect of additional, supplementary and urgent items, to be prepared in accordance with decision WHA69(8), also address other ambiguities, gaps and other shortcomings in the Rules of Procedure of the governing bodies”.

With respect to proposals connected with this mandate (contained in section C of the consultation document), it was noted that Member States’ comments so far indicated interest in moving forward on all 10 items proposed for consideration, namely: a) provision of written statements for the record; b) Voting through electronic means at the Assembly; c) Credentials at the World Health Assembly; d) Better reflection of gender equity in the language of the rules of procedure; e) Time-limits for submitting draft resolutions and decisions; f) Clarification of entitlement to vote between delegates, alternates and advisers attending the Health Assembly; g) Better reflection of established practice regarding the summary and verbatim records of the Assembly; h) Introduction of a motion to suspend the debate; i) Clarification of terminology regarding public and private meetings of the Board; j) Alignment of the rules of procedure with the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors.

Accordingly, where appropriate, specific wording for amendment of the Rules of Procedure would be provided in the document on this matter for the Board in January 2018

Measures to promote effective agenda management and strategic decision-making by the governing bodies

At its meeting with the Director-General on 31 July – 1 August, the Officers of the Executive Board had recommended that Member States be requested to contribute their views on the roles and methods of work of the Executive Board and its Officers, with a view to improving efficiency and equity in decision-making.

In an update to the Officers of the Board, it was noted that Member States' comments so far indicated a lack of consensus in some areas and support for others.

With regard to improving time management of meetings of the Board, concern was expressed that Rule 3, amended in 2003 and intended to ensure inclusive participation of non-members in the deliberations of the Executive Board, may have unintentionally resulted in less equitable participation and longer sessions in light of asymmetries among countries in supporting delegations to the Board. They also suggested that time-savings might be found in limiting discussion on items presented for “noting” where consensus was clearly well established.

The Officers requested the Secretariat to share with the Bureau the consultation document and the outcomes of the consultation process for their further discussion when they meet on the margins of the forthcoming special session.

5. Proposed additional session of the Executive Board

The Director-General provided an update on the discussion on the draft GPW13 at the regional committees. He noted that the current consultation process would end on 13 October and that input had been useful and positive, with consensus building on completing the process of development of the GPW by May 2018. He outlined his vision for a GPW fully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, with a clear statement of vision, mission and priorities as well as clear messages that would bring the different parts of the Organization together, promote harmonization across different areas of work and help Member States to achieve progress in key areas. He described his agenda for change which was already taking shape, and highlighted the shifts in WHO's methods of work that would be reflected in the GPW.

It was noted that 13 Member States had requested a special session of the Executive Board to discuss the GPW. Preparations for this to take place on 22-23 November 2017 were now well advanced. An online consultation was in place although Member States had so far only made use of the regional committees to comment on the current concept document. The draft document for discussion at the special session would be issued on 1 November, at which time the online consultation would also be reopened for Member States as well as other stakeholders.

The Officers expressed support for the second online consultation since not all Members of the Board might be able to attend the Special Session. With regard to expected outcomes, they considered that Member States were looking forward to a strategic document that was focused and concise, that highlighted leadership in health, and that sought consensus for WHO to work on the normative aspects of the SDGs.

They encouraged the Director-General to continue to engage with members of the Executive Board, to continue to help Member States understand his vision for WHO, and to encourage use of the GPW as a transformative agenda for Member States also. They expressed the hope that the special session would describe how the GPW would be applied to the work covered

by the programme budget 2018-2019 and that implementation would not be delayed to the following biennium.

The Director-General expressed the hope that the GPW would reinforce his vision for a redefined role both for the Officers of the Board, and for the Board itself, since the shifts envisioned in the work of the Organization would need concomitant shifts in governance. He reiterated his belief that the role of Officers offered great potential as a bridge between sessions of the Executive Board and that they had much to contribute through enhanced communication with their regional colleagues on the Board and through closer engagement with the Secretariat. The Board itself could consider improving its strategic functions in a number of ways, including through enhancing the role of Board Members in coordinating with and representing their region. He proposed to form a small task force/working group to study the matter and propose possible mechanisms for consideration by the governing bodies

The Officers agreed that this would be a continuing process of change and recommended continued engagement on the subject of governance reform at all opportunities, including mission briefings and regional committees.

6. Closing session

The Director-General thanked the Officers of the Board for their commitment to the work of the Executive Board and for their contribution to the process of change being initiated within WHO.