11-15 January 2021: Series of briefings/debates hosted by the Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2)

148th Session of the WHO Executive Board: Another waste of time – or time to restore WHO as directing global health authority?

What reform agenda for the WHO EB (and the World Health Assembly)?

Introduction by Thomas Schwarz
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Medicus Mundi International Network @mni_updates · Oct 5, 2020
Replying to @G2H2_Geneva and @WHO
#EBSSS5 #EBSpecial #COVID19 #healthgovernance

...strange "calls" today for a more "executive" @WHO EB. But, Dear delegates, this is YOUR Executive Board, and you should not demand leadership, but assume it! Over the last years you have not succeeded to reform it.

Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2) @G2H2_Geneva · 22m
#WHA73 TODAY
Friday 13 November

Rather ceremonial World Health Assembly closes one day early with ceremonial plenary session. Pity that over-regulation of Committee sessions left WHA without substantive and focused debates. #healthgovernance #notamused

First days of #covid19 World Health Assembly dominated by the sound of silence, with almost no traffic on #WHA73 except #Taiwan. Anybody out there?? Remember when we met in Geneva, crowded rooms and corridors, side events, #walkthetalk. Sigh...
What reform agenda for the WHO EB (and the World Health Assembly)?

Introduction by Thomas Schwarz
Medicus Mundi international Network

What should be on the agenda of an EB reform retreat announced for the current year? If we listen to analysis and proposals by to EB members and “friends of the WHO” at/after the “difficult” EB Special Session in October, it is about the following:
What reform agenda for the WHO EB (and the World Health Assembly)?

WHO Governing Body meetings: Overcome current inefficiency through (further) review of format and procedures

I also think that the format of the EB should be changed. When I hear the EB, I hear a lot of speeches, prepared from their capitals, a lot of time wasted, one day and a half maybe, hearing ourselves, and there is not much interaction really pointing out the topics that we should be discussing. I think it’s a problem in the multilateral area that we should be solving.

Frank Tressler Zamorano, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations in Geneva

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WHO Governing Body meetings: Overcome current inefficiency through (further) review of format and procedures

I also think the way of working of the EB needs to change. I think we hear a lot of information, we hear a lot of speeches, prepared from their capitals, a lot of time wasted, one day and a half maybe, hearing ourselves, and there is not much interaction really pointing out the topics that we should be discussing. I think it’s a problem in the multilateral area that we should be solving.

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EB format and procedures at EB 148

- **Item 1, Opening of the session**
  Document EB 148/2, special procedures

- **Item 19.2, WHO reform: Governance**
  Document EB148/33 not yet available (mainly on agenda control?)

- **Item 19.2, WHO reform: Involvement of non-State actors in WHO’s governing bodies**
  Document EB148/35 (informal meeting; incentives for non-State actors to deliver a limited number of constituency statements)
What reform agenda for the WHO EB (and the World Health Assembly)?

WHO Executive Board: Regain relevance through providing stronger leadership, oversight and advice to Member States and Secretariat

Is the Executive Board an active governing body, or is it just a ceremonial one that only expresses gratitude towards the work we are doing? I personally want to see us here as an active executive board, one which is guiding us through the pandemic crises, through finding solutions and strategies in this most challenging public health crisis in terms of socioeconomic effects. We are the governing body, meaning we have to exercise leadership.

Clemens Auer, Special Envoy for Health, Federal Republic of Austria
WHO Executive Board Member

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WHO Executive Board: Regain relevance through providing stronger leadership, oversight and advice to Member States and secretariat.

“I personally feel that one of the worst governance decisions ever taken in WHO was to change the way the Executive Board functions. **It is no longer a Board. It is no longer a body that really advises the Director-General and the other member states. And that is reflected in how it functions, and it is reflected in why it is not called on.** Why call on this Board, if it does not give me input, quite honestly, if I am the Director-General?

*Ilona Kickbusch, The Graduate Institute*

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WHO Executive Board: Regain relevance through providing stronger leadership, oversight and advice to Member States and Secretariat

If there is a problem with WHO, we are part of the problem as member states, and we also need to be part of the solution. (...) Even before Covid the Board did not really fulfil its oversight role as foreseen in the constitution. This certainly needs to change. We should clarify with ourselves how we want to perform this oversight role. We want to hold a retreat as soon as that is possible to see how we can improve the situation for the future."

Björn Kümmel, Deputy Head, Division of Global Health
Federal Ministry of Health of Germany; Vice-Chair, WHO EB

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What reform agenda for the WHO EB (and the World Health Assembly)?

World Health Assembly: Regain relevance through reactivating its constitutional role of setting public health rules at a global level

Today more than ever, it is necessary to form a strong coalition of countries willing to defend the public character, authority and independence of WHO, so as to allow it to set public health rules at a global level with the capacity and the instruments necessary to put those rules into practice. (…) The negotiation of “global and binding instruments on health matters of global concern” is perhaps the most promising avenue for the role that WHO could take on in the future.

Germán Velásquez, South Centre

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Germán Velásquez, South Centre

“The Health Assembly shall have authority to adopt conventions or agreements in respect of any matter within the competence of the Organization.

A two-thirds vote of the Health Assembly shall be required for the adoption of such conventions or agreements, which shall come into force for each Member when accepted by it in accordance with its constitutional processes”.

Article 19 of the WHO constitution
What reform agenda for the WHO EB (and the World Health Assembly)?

WHO (governing bodies): Improve legitimacy through democratization and decolonization

“Can we build a more equitable global health decision-making situation, also within the WHO, but in global health generally? Because we cannot continue along the lines that the ones who pay the most can call the tune. That needs a lot of discussion. It also means that the member states, and I mean all of them, need to be much more proactive within the WHO and its governing bodies. So I think the member states and the secretariat have to start doing some reflection here how can this governance be improved.

Ilona Kickbusch, The Graduate Institute

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WHO (governing bodies): Improve legitimacy through democratization and decolonization

And, you know, the representation of countries, and in particular countries of the global south, is strong in these bodies. So if these bodies functioned properly, then these voices could be heard better. (…) And then my question is: Are the countries of the global south going to use the fact that they have a lot of votes to actually introduce and push for a stronger WHO? (…) Let's have some fights over the next some five years about that. But let's set it as an agenda.

Ilona Kickbusch, The Graduate Institute

Liberate WHO!

EB148 will discuss financial matters and in particular the proposed programme budget of WHO and the scale of assessments for the years 2022–2023 (agenda item 17).

Substantially increasing assessed contributions would be the highly needed step to liberate WHO from its dependency from big donors (including member states) and their political agenda.

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_Ilona Kickbusch, The Graduate Institute_

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WHO and other multilateral institutions: Regain relevance and legitimacy by working closer to/with the people

There is another important thing about this multilateral organization. When we got into this pandemic, not only we got into a different scenario with globalization, with digital and information era, but also the society has changed. There was a lot of questioning about how multilateral institutions were working, solving the problems and the needs of the citizens. We need to get these institutions closer to the people. We need to explain the things we do to the society.

Frank Tressler Zamorano, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations in Geneva

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### Synthesis of proposals

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<th>Legitimacy</th>
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**MY CHECKLIST TO ASSESS THESE PROPOSALS**

- **CLARITY/OPERABILITY**
  Are the proposals clear, and can they be easily implemented?

- **POTENTIAL RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS**
  If implemented, will these reforms lead to substantial change?

- **POLITICAL FEASIBILITY**
  Will these proposals be accepted and promoted by the Members?

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Contact: schwarz@medicusmundi.org
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Rapid assessments of proposals via Zoom poll

1. Potential relevance and effectiveness
   Which proposals / approaches for the reform of the WHO Governing Bodies have the potential to really make a difference, if they are implemented?

2. Acceptance, leadership and commitment
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Introduction by Thomas Schwarz
Medicus Mundi international Network

Thank you.

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