

WHAT DEFINES GLOBAL HEALTH LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

On 1 July 2017, a newly appointed Director-General (DG) of the World Health Organization (WHO) will take office. With the high political attention to health following the Ebola outbreak, as well as the beginning of a new era of sustainable development, the new DG will face an extraordinary set of challenges. They will have to manage a highly complex organisation with 194 Member States, six regional offices and 150 offices in countries, territories and areas, while advancing WHO reform building on the foundations laid by their predecessors.

As an international organisation with a strong constitutional mandate, WHO has to protect its independent goals while being dependent on its Member States and their diverse interests. The ability to employ strategies to respond to exogenous demands within difficult political contexts requires exceptional leadership. Clearly, different leadership qualities and strategies are necessary at different points in time to face evolving strategic challenges in global governance.

Indeed, the next DG will face multiple challenges in global governance, an area that is increasingly complex and diverse. It is intensified through shifts of focus from global health governance to the global governance of other sectors or policy regimes impacting on health, as well as to governance at the regional and national levels in relation to global health. In addition, the trend to govern through networks is changing decision-making patterns towards horizontal approaches and increasing multi-polarities are enabling a global powershift.

At the same time, the governance of the global health domain is becoming more political: heads of state or government have become more engaged; an increasing number of health issues moved on to the agenda of the UN; and political clubs and regional organisations are increasingly responding to global health challenges.

The new DG, therefore, has to decide how to play political hardball in this complex arena, while carefully balancing it with the traditional normative and technical assistance role of the organisation as well as its internal and external challenges. They will have to respond to the call for greater social, technical and political accountability, both by Member States and by non-state actors.

THE PROJECT GOALS

Amidst the above background, selecting the right person in 2017 will be critical for the future of the WHO. Many see it as “make or break” and expectations are high. Therefore, the Global Health Centre wants to raise more awareness and debate around global health leadership and the WHO DG election through this project, contributing to a more open process and ensuring the required profile for the next DG is well defined. This is particularly important because the rules of the game have changed: for the first time, the new DG will be appointed by the full World Health Assembly through secret ballots.

THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project is carried out by the Global Health Centre at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in collaboration with different partners. It includes three main project activities.

Policy consultations: A high-level multi-stakeholder roundtable will be organised together with the Blatvanik School of Government at the University of Oxford to discuss what global health leadership means in the 21st century. It will bring together participants from international organisations, governments, private sector and civil society to discuss leadership qualities required of the next DG.

Publications: Key results from the roundtable will be presented and distributed widely to feed into the election process. Publications in the form of working papers and policy briefs will provide general guidance to Member States on the required leadership qualities, helping them in choosing the right person.

Public hearing: In January 2017, the Executive Board will nominate up to three candidates from which the 70th World Health Assembly will choose. To allow for a wider group of stakeholders to hear from and assess the candidates, they will be invited to the Graduate Institute in Geneva in Spring 2017 for a public hearing. This event will be organised together with the UN Foundation.

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