



Consultative Group on Programme Development

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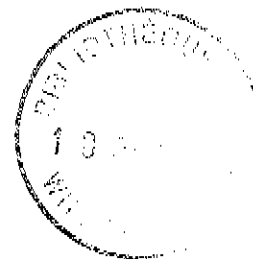
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RATIONALIZATION OF PROCEDURES
AT REGIONAL COMMITTEE SESSIONS

A description is given of the systems currently used in the European and other regions. Alternatives are suggested for use in the European Region.



1. Introduction

Following a recommendation by the Consultative Group on Budgetary Questions, a brief analysis has been made of the present system of preparation of the minutes of the Regional Committee, with a view to suggesting ways of rationalizing it.

2. Description of the present system in the European Regional Committee

During the meetings, nine précis-writers alternate in taking down summarized notes of interventions made in the language they cover.

After each meeting the précis is handed to the speaker for his clearance.

All the précis for one meeting are then collated in the order in which the speakers took the floor, irrespective of which language they used.

With the exception of the précis of the Saturday morning meeting (and possibly of those speakers who leave the session before the end), which need mail clearance, all the précis of the Regional Committee session are thus cleared and collated, meeting by meeting, before they are taken back to Copenhagen.

After the Regional Committee session the quadrilingual précis are edited, the non-English parts being translated into that language. Any ambiguities or doubtful points may be checked on the recorded tape of the relevant meeting.

The minutes are then translated into the other working languages, using the original précis as approved by the speakers for each language version. At this stage any discrepancies brought to light can be rectified, thus ensuring the uniformity of the different language versions.

Final reproduction of the original English minutes is normally completed by early December (two-and-a-half months after the Regional Committee session), the other language versions following when ready.

3. Cost of the present system

Many external factors influence the cost of holding Regional Committee sessions, and only approximate indications can be given in this paper. The figures which follow are based on the London session, taking a rate of exchange of \$1 = D.kr. 5.50.

On-the-spot costs (mainly related to précis writing service)	\$ 22 000 ¹
Regional Office costs	\$ 25 000
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	\$ 47 000
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4. Comments on the present system

The "sandwich" system used in the European Region is probably the most accurate, especially in view of the fact that all texts are cleared in the original language by the speakers. It is, however, cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive (about twice the price of a blue-cover report of about the same size (also in four languages) which receives a much wider distribution).

5. Other systems used in WHO

5.1 WHA committees and Executive Board

The précis-writers take notes only in English, i.e., when the intervention is not in English, they have to work via the interpreters. However, when writing their précis, they also have use of (a) the tapes in the original language (at least for English, French and Spanish, the others in English or French interpretation); (b) verbatim transcripts of French, Russian and Spanish interventions.

Each précis, when drafted, is cleared by responsible WHO staff, revised and sent for translation into French, Russian and Spanish. The English summary records are then issued and circulated 48 to 72 hours after the relevant meeting, the other languages following at various intervals.

This system has the advantage that texts in all four working languages are produced during or immediately after the session, no work being required afterwards. But since this requires translators and typists at the place of the session, this appears to be only a shift in costs. The Regional Committee session is much shorter (4-1/2 days) than the World Health Assembly or the Executive Board, so that a delay of 48 to 72 hours in presentation of the English minutes, and even longer for the other languages, while acceptable there, would defeat the purpose of having the minutes ready "on the spot".

5.2 Other regions

5.2.1 Two regional committees (AFRO and EMRO) dispense altogether with summary records and, instead, produce a more detailed report. This certainly seems to be a very economical proposition. However, such a change of procedure in the European Region would require acceptance, by means of a resolution, by the members of the Regional Committee, who might be hesitant to do so for various reasons: their only chance to correct misinterpretation of their statements would be on the Saturday morning, which might lengthen the meeting; in European Regional Committee reports, statements are reported in an anonymous way ("one representative said ...") so that, apart from the speaker himself who will recognize his intervention, other members and later readers have no way of knowing who said what; finally, speakers may wish their intervention (or part of it) to be reported in full, which risks lengthening the report and poses retrieval difficulties (unless the speaker, in such cases, himself provides the full text of what he wants inserted).

5.2.2 In AMRO, the proceedings of the Regional Committee undergo only minimum editorial review and are printed in the language spoken by representatives at the session, without translation. While most interventions are in Spanish, the document is strictly speaking quadrilingual (English, French, Portuguese and Spanish). However, PAHO undertakes to provide translations of portions of the minutes should Governments so request.

The interesting feature is the distribution of the AMRO minutes in a sandwich quadrilingual format. From the point of view of the European Regional Committee, adopting such a system, while not so economic as the AFRO/EMRO one, would still reduce the costs of production by eliminating any subsequent editorial/translation work in the Regional Office (amounting to a saving of some \$20 000).

¹ Partly paid by host country.

5.2.3 In SEARO, summary records are produced within 24 hours of the meeting to which they refer. No translation is needed, since the only language used is English. In addition, a brief committee report is produced, based on the minutes. Later, after final editing, both minutes and report are distributed to Governments.

While hardly applicable to the European Region, which uses not one but four languages, this system is interesting in that secretarial staff from the Office are used as précis-writers. This certainly implies a reduction in salary/travel costs, especially if the secretaries used for this work do their own typing. On the other hand, such an arrangement would necessitate special training of the secretarial staff involved; additionally, such staff, if detached from their regular duties in the Regional Office, may need to be replaced temporarily, thus reducing the savings made on salaries.

5.2.4 In WPRO, the system is more or less similar to that used in SEARO, the only differences being that the material is produced in two languages and that the report is slightly more detailed.

6. Possible alternatives

In considering the alternatives outlined below it should be kept in mind that alternatives 6.1 and 6.2, and possibly also 6.3, would require a resolution or decision by the Regional Committee in order to amend Rule 18 of the Rules of Procedure.

6.1 Adoption of AFRO/EMRO system (extended report and no minutes)

As mentioned before, this is undoubtedly the cheapest alternative. Provided the report is substantial enough and, where appropriate, gives the name (or nationality) of the speakers, it should cover adequately the main points raised during the discussions.

If such an extended and more detailed report did not exceed some 25 pages (as against 12 now), no strengthening of staff needed to produce and translate the report should be required.

6.2 Extended report plus cassettes

This would be a refinement of the first alternative. To compensate for the absence of minutes, sets of cassettes (18 x 90 minutes) could be produced in Copenhagen after the session, in each of the four languages and one set sent to each Government in the language desired. The cost should not exceed \$2500 per year, plus an initial non-recurrent investment of some \$2500. Another possibility would be to send the Member States one set of cassettes in the language of their choice and another in the original languages (bringing the total cost to some \$5000 a year).

If Member States accepted this system, a full record of the discussions at the Regional Committee would be available for a cost of \$44 500 to \$42 000 less than at present.

6.3 Production of minutes along the lines of AMRO

In principle, this would involve only a change in the method of production of the final minutes (no editing and no translation (unless requested) being provided); otherwise, the present system would be maintained: brief report plus minutes. As mentioned above, the economy of \$20 000 would not be made on the spot, but in the Office.

6.4 Use of secretarial staff as précis-writers

The possibility is worth investigating to find out whether - without reduction in quality - it would really result in any economy. The training of existing staff would also need to be considered.

6.5 Maintaining the present system

As already indicated, this is the most reliable and comprehensive of all systems, but also the most expensive.