

EB/APC/Mtg/08/1

November 14, 2008

To: Members of the Agenda and Procedures Committee (Mr. Rutayisire, Chairman;
Mr. Al Nassar, Mr. Claveranne, Mr. Heath, Mr. Henriksson, Mr. Moser, Mr. Warjiyo)

From: Shailendra J. Anjaria, Committee Secretary

Subject: **Agenda and Procedures Committee—Summary Record of Meeting 08/1**

Attached for the **information** of the Committee and other Executive Directors is the summary record of the September 18, 2008 meeting of the Agenda and Procedures Committee.

Att: (1)

Other Distribution:
Members of the Executive Board
Department Heads

**SUMMARY RECORD OF THE MEETING OF THE
AGENDA AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE
MEETING 08/1**

September 18, 2008—3:00 p.m.

Members present: Mr. Rutayisire (Chairman), Mr. Al Nassar, Mr. Claveranne, Mr. Heath, Mr. Henriksson, Mr. Moser, Mr. Warjiyo, Mr. Anjaria (Committee Secretary)

Also present: Ms. Abdelati, Ms. Alvarez, Mr. Crispolti, Mr. Dheerasinghe, Mr. Kotegawa, Mr. Maciel, Ms. Mañalac, Mr. Mori, Ms. Rieck, Mr. Rottier, Mr. Rouai, Mr. Schilperoort, Mr. Thornton, Mr. Ukpong

Bunching of Items on the Executive Board Calendar

The Agenda and Procedures Committee (APC) considered, as a first item, the issues raised in Mr. Shaalan's July 31, 2008, memorandum regarding the bunching of items on the Executive Board Calendar.

The Secretary reviewed the process for scheduling the Board calendar. He explained that there are two basic processes for scheduling a Board item.

Country Items. The process for scheduling country items for Board discussion normally starts when the briefing paper for the staff mission is prepared and the Mission Chief requests a tentative date for a Board discussion. If there is space on the Board calendar, the item is penciled in for the requested date. If more than three items are already scheduled on the requested day, another date is tentatively scheduled.

About one month before the Board date, SEC contacts the Mission Chief to confirm that the country item is on track for the previously penciled-in date. If the Mission Chief confirms that that is the case, SEC verifies that the date is convenient and feasible for the Executive Director representing that country. SEC then also confirms with the Deputy Managing Director who has a purview on that country. If both conditions are met, the date is confirmed and announced; if not, SEC continues to work with the Mission Chief, the Executive Director, and management to find an alternative agreeable date. The general rule of thumb is that if the calendar for the Board on a given day has four items, SEC tries to schedule the items in a way that avoids overcrowding.

As has previously been discussed in the APC, there is an understanding among the management team that if one of them will be away during the period in which a country in his purview is scheduled for Board discussion, another member of management could chair the Board discussion for that country. However, there are limits to that process. For example, the Managing Director and the First Deputy Managing Director are intimately involved in all stages of the Article IV consultation with the largest shareholder of the Fund, and it would be odd if the Board were to proceed with the discussion of that country on a day that both the

Managing Director and the First Managing Director were not available. The same consideration can apply to other member countries, where a firsthand understanding of country issues may be of particular importance. The process accordingly needs to be pursued with flexibility.

Non-Country or Policy Items. The starting point for scheduling policy items in the Board is the Managing Director's six-monthly Work Program Statement, which the Executive Board discusses and which draws from work arising from the guidance and general direction from the IMFC and other internal Board discussions. SEC assembles information on envisaged Work Program items from the different departments. The documentation that SEC collects include the timings proposed by the authoring department, either in time-band form or in terms of specific dates. The broad idea at the Work Program preparation stage is to ensure that all or most of the policy items for which direction has been received from the IMFC are included in the Work Program, and that the broad sequencing of the Work Program items is feasible and coherent. SEC aims in the Work Program process to capture a snapshot of the staff's and management's thinking about how the Work Program will evolve. The Work Program, nonetheless, aims at being as complete as it can be at the time the paper is issued, although subsequent changes are sometimes required.

About 4-6 weeks ahead of the date tentatively set in the Work Program Statement for a particular item, SEC contacts the authoring department of the paper to confirm that the paper is on track and schedule a tentative date. SEC then regularly checks with the authoring department as the paper goes through the different review stages: within the department, by other departments, and by management. Once management has cleared the paper for distribution, SEC then adds that item to the Board calendar and announces it, paying due regard to the minimum circulation period of three weeks for most non-country staff papers.

Bunching

The Secretary also reviewed the factors giving rise to bunching, and steps being taken to help address the problem. The bunching in July 2008 was the result of the confluence of several factors. There was a spike in the number of stand-alone Article IV consultation discussions in July 2008. Out of 45 country items, there were 22 stand-alone Article IVs, which was well above the average for that period. The number of non-country items was also significant, and those items accounted for about half of Board meeting time. In addition, the Executive Board also spent significant time on Board Committee meetings during the month. The Committee on Executive Board Administrative Matters had four meetings totaling 12 hours in July, which was highly exceptional. There were also other discussions on the GFSR Market Update, a briefing on the Guidance on the Operational Aspects of the 2007 Surveillance Decision, briefings and discussions on the Medical Benefits Plan, and a briefing by the External Audit Committee.

The possibility that there would be overcrowding in July did not become apparent until after most of the Article IV consultations had been scheduled, the Secretary explained. SEC had initially scheduled 11 country and non-country items before July that were delayed for

various reasons until July. Hence, part of the bunching was due to certain items that were supposed to have been taken up earlier.

To deal with the issue, SEC has started a process to improve coordinated planning of the timing of Article IV discussions in the Board. SEC requested area departments at the beginning of August to provide tentative dates for surveillance items for the next 12 months. SEC has received that information and will carefully review the requested dates with area departments to ensure that the bunching that occurred in July 2008 will not recur.

Discussion

Speakers generally noted that greater participation by the Board in the scheduling of Board items is desirable, particularly on policy items. In this regard, they pointed to the apparent disconnect between the Board discussion of its Work Program Statement and the work program that is implemented. The suggestion to form a Steering Committee similar to the one at the Bank, which meets monthly to discuss the Board schedule, received broad support from speakers¹.

Speakers also expressed a preference for a more forward-looking Executive Board Calendar that would include, for example, Board items up to three months ahead. While noting the Secretary's caution that such a calendar would, from previous experience, entail frequent changes as items are rescheduled in light of operational developments, some speakers pointed out that extending the time horizon of the Executive Board Calendar would allow Executive Directors to better plan their offices' activities, including official travel.

Speakers also emphasized the importance of the Board having greater say in the format of Board discussions. Several speakers called attention to the fact that a few important recent policy discussions were conducted using an informal format, which meant that no official record of Directors' positions or of the discussion was prepared. Speakers broadly supported the view that the proposed Steering Committee—whose meetings any Executive Director would have the chance to attend—could provide a forum for discussing the format of Board discussions.

The Chairman noted that, in considering the establishment of a Steering Committee, it would be important to also bear in mind that certain concomitant processes—for example, the process by which Directors consult with capitals—would also need to be taken into account.

¹ The World Bank Executive Directors' Work Program is prepared by the Bank's Corporate Secretariat in consultation with the Bank management and a Board Steering Committee. The tentative schedule of Board events, including a three-month rolling calendar, is reviewed each month by the Steering Committee.

It was agreed that as the next step, the APC should obtain further information about the Bank's Steering Committee.

Improving the Quality of Executive Board Discussions

The members of the APC and other speakers provided their views on useful steps that the Executive Board could take to improve the quality of Executive Board discussions.

The issue of the timeliness and quality of preliminary gray statements was brought up. It was suggested that early submission of gray statements by Executive Directors could enable staff to provide a written response to Directors' questions prior to the Board meeting. In this regard, a few speakers pointed out that some questions that staff chose to reply to bilaterally were sometimes also of interest to other Directors, and could be made available to all members of the Board.

A suggestion was advanced that a secure discussion forum or blog site could be set up for Directors to post their comments and questions on the staff report a week prior to the Board meeting. The discussion on the forum could form the basis for the draft summing up and the staff's responses.

It was also suggested that Board discussions could be made more efficient and effective if the Chairman or Acting Chair would moderate the discussions more actively, including by steering the discussion on key issues.

The idea of limiting speakers' time was also suggested, with reference to the system at the Bank, where a buzzer sounds to signal the expiration of the speaker's allotted time.

A suggestion was also made that certain issues could be screened through Board committees for a technical discussion before being brought to the full Board.

Speakers recalled that several of the issues discussed today had been discussed in the past, and that it would be useful to compile such items for APC review.

The meeting concluded at 4:40 p.m.