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Investing in rural people

Proposal for an Automated Voting System at IFAD

Note to Executive Board representatives

Focal points:

Technical questions:

Atsuko Hirose
Secretary of IFAD
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2254
e-mail: a.hirose@ifad.org

Thomas Bousios
Director
Information and Communications Technology Division
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2288
e-mail: t.bousios@ifad.org

Dispatch of documentation:

Deirdre McGrenra
Chief
Governing Bodies
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2374
e-mail: gb@ifad.org

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For: Approval

Recommendation for approval

The Executive Board is invited to endorse submission of the recommendation contained in paragraph 26 to the Governing Council at its forty-second session.

Proposal for an Automated Voting System at IFAD

I. Background

1. In 2017, IFAD's Governing Council Bureau carried out a review of the established good practice for the appointment of the President of IFAD, as tasked by the Governing Council at its fortieth session in February 2017, with a view to making proposals to enhance such practice for future appointments.¹
2. The Governing Council decided that "the process leading to the appointment of the President of IFAD be continued subject to the improvements recommended by the Bureau, which Management is hereby tasked with implementing."²
3. The improvements recommended by the Bureau included the possibility of introducing an automated system to expedite ballot-counting during the appointment process and thereby increase efficiency. The Bureau also recommended that the voting for the appointment should continue to be held by secret ballot.
4. With regard to the ballot-counting system, the Bureau noted that the preparation and distribution of the anonymous ballot papers, as required by rule 35.3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council, were complex, time-consuming and resource-heavy processes. The Bureau's report was submitted to the Governing Council at its forty-first session in February 2018.³
5. At the session, the Governing Council approved the report and adopted resolution 202/XLI contained therein, including the Governing Council Bureau's recommendation, "that the Secretariat explore electronic voting or other forms of automated processes and report to the Executive Board for possible submission of recommendations to the Governing Council in 2019."⁴ The Governing Council also noted that should an automated voting system be approved for implementation, an amendment to rule 35.3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council would be necessary.

II. Objective

6. The overall goal of this proposal is to explore the possibility of deploying an automated voting system to be used by the Governing Council for the appointment of the President of IFAD, and possibly for other matters requiring a decision by the Council through a vote by secret ballot, substantially in accordance with the principles proposed below. Such a system would expedite the ballot-counting process and increase workforce efficiency while ensuring the required confidentiality and accountability.

¹ See Governing Council resolution 197/XL.

² See Governing Council resolution 202/XLI.

³ See Report of the Governing Council Bureau on the Review of the Established Practice for the Process Leading to the Appointment of the President of IFAD (GC 41/L.9).

⁴ Ibid.

III. Principles

7. In light of the above, the high-level principles identified for such a system, should the decision be made to proceed, are:

Ensuring confidentiality

8. In accordance with the Governing Council Bureau's recommendation, the voting for the appointment of the President should continue to be held by secret ballot. The voters should be able to enter their credentials and personal data, and the system should allow for their authentication with the possibility of using modern methods such as smart cards to guarantee the secrecy and validity of the vote. Ultimately, the system should ensure that the data cannot be manipulated and that the voting process is confidential, and also that it provides for secure archival of the results and all related information.

Prevention measures from cyberattacks

9. Cyberattacks on systems are a reality that need to be managed. Therefore, the system must be designed and configured in such a way as to reduce the risk of being hacked. The system should have built-in security features and should be set up to minimize the probability of attack.

Verifiability and integrity

10. Voter verifiability will be a key aspect of the system because it is important that voters can confirm not only that their votes have been cast, but also that they have been cast correctly. In addition, in the case of disputes or audits, there may be the need to verify that the system has recorded the votes correctly.
11. The integrity of the election process needs to be safeguarded to ensure that the votes have not been manipulated.

System accessibility

12. To ensure successful implementation, the system should be user-friendly and easily accessible to all voters, including voters with disabilities. The system should use an interface that the voter can navigate to cast his/her vote. The interface should be provided in the four official languages of IFAD.

Compatibility with IFAD systems

13. The system must be compatible with IFAD infrastructure and allow secure and easy integration with IFAD's existing systems.

Other features

14. Additional features and functionalities related to the voting system will be explored during the procurement process.

IV. Process

15. In July 2018, the Secretariat issued a request for information through the procurement portal. Three responses were received and evaluated.
16. This exercise enabled the Secretariat to make a preliminary assessment of some of the options available on the market and to attain a better understanding of the benefits of different systems and the added value for IFAD. Furthermore, it helped to clarify aspects related to vote secrecy and integrity and the functional aspects of automated voting. The information gathered will prove useful should the decision be made to proceed with a formal procurement process to purchase or rent such a system.

V. Benefits

17. Implementing an automated voting system for the appointment of the President would result in:
 - a streamlined process and efficiency gains through reduced costs for preparing, distributing, collecting, calculating, storing and safeguarding the ballots;
 - significant time-saving for IFAD Membership and IFAD staff;
 - enhanced image for IFAD as a result of its innovative and modernized processes; and
 - enhanced confidentiality/security: elimination of paper ballots would reduce the number of people involved in the process and thereby reduce the risk of unauthorized access to data.

VI. Risks and mitigation measures

18. The risks addressed below are generic risks related to an electronic voting system, as a specific system has yet to be identified.
19. The major concern with electronic voting systems is the security risk and the resulting risk of compromising the integrity of an election process due to the manipulation of data and voting results. Cyberattacks are more likely in an open environment such as the Internet. To mitigate the risk of data manipulation, automated voting would be carried out in an isolated system environment within the context of the Governing Council venue. The separation from other systems connected to the Internet would significantly reduce the risk of an external attack and would be easier to secure as compared to an open system.
20. Another risk identified is the verifiability of the vote cast in the case of a dispute. The use of paper ballots provides evidence of the votes cast. With an automated system, verifiability is a more complex matter and raises the question of what can be considered as evidence. The market offers systems that produce electronic ballot trails based on cryptographic methods. These will be explored in line with industry best practices.
21. Further analysis of the potential risks and mitigation actions will be performed both during the selection process and once the system has been selected.

VII. Estimated cost

22. Based on the responses to the request for information, the Secretariat has earmarked funds within the capital budget. It will be in a better position to estimate the costs once the procurement process has been completed.

VIII. Tentative time frame

23. Should the Executive Board endorse the present proposal for an automated voting system at IFAD, the proposal will be submitted for approval to the Governing Council in February 2019.
24. With the approval of the Governing Council, IFAD will proceed with the issuance of a formal request for proposals (tender) of an automated voting system. The Executive Board will be kept abreast of developments and should it recommend proceeding, the Secretariat will aim to arrange for testing of the selected system on the margins of the Governing Council session of 2020.
25. Following the results of the testing, discussions will be held with the Governing Council Bureau on the way forward. This could include the submission of a draft resolution with amendments to rule 35.3 of the Rules of Procedure of the

Governing Council to the Executive Board by December 2020 for endorsement and submission to the Governing Council in 2021.

IX. Recommendation

26. In line with the decision taken at the forty-first session of the Governing Council in February 2018, as contained in resolution 202/XLI, and the related approval of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Governing Council Bureau, document GC 41/L.9, the Executive Board is invited to recommend to the Governing Council that it approve, at its forty-second session, that the Secretariat further pursue the process of assessing the feasibility of an automated voting system based on the principles contained in this document.