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Review of the Governing Body Documentation Guidelines

Note to Executive Board representatives

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Annex

Revised word limits for governing body documents

Abbreviations and acronyms

BPR	business process re-engineering
IOE	Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD
RIDE	Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness

Recommendation for approval

The Executive Board is invited to approve the proposed revisions to the governing body documentation guidelines as reflected in the recommendation contained in paragraph 14.

Review of the Governing Body Documentation Guidelines

I. Background

1. At the 107th session of the Executive Board, Management presented an implementation plan for a set of proposals related to the volume and range of documentation presented to IFAD's governing bodies, to increase efficiency without undermining the Board's capacity to perform its functions ([EB 2012/107/R.4](#)). These proposed measures and an implementation plan were reviewed at the 110th session of the Executive Board ([EB 2013/110/R.4](#)).
2. In the intervening years, the types and lengths of documents presented to IFAD's governing bodies have changed to respond to requests for additional information by Executive Board representatives, and to reflect the Fund's evolution as a financial institution. The number of documents has also increased as a consequence of IFAD's growing and evolving programme of work (4,607,572 words were processed in 2018, equivalent to approximately 13,165 pages, while in 2020 this figure had grown to 6,240,537 words, equivalent to approximately 17,800 pages).
3. Board representatives have expressed appreciation for an improvement in document quality but have noted that documents have become increasingly lengthy, with a tendency to contain detailed background/introductory sections while important information is relegated to annexes or appendices. They have also requested that documents be made available with the lead time necessary to allow them to be shared with colleagues in the capitals when necessary.
4. The business process re-engineering (BPR) exercise, undertaken as part of the People, Processes and Technology Plan, revealed the need to ensure consistency across documents and to reduce word count as key aspects in guaranteeing the submission of high quality documentation to the Fund's governing bodies. The timely submission of governing body documentation to the Office of the Secretary and adherence to established word limits are fundamental for efficient planning and IFAD's ability to dispatch documentation in accordance with the Executive Board-approved timeline ([EB 2015/115/R.25](#)), particularly considering the limited resources of the Language Services unit, which operates with one senior editor for English and one senior translator/reviser respectively for Arabic, French and Spanish.
5. One of the BPR's recommendations was to review and amend the guidelines for the preparation of governing body documents, in particular with respect to word limits, the use of annexes and appendices, the number of annexes and whether annexes should continue to be translated ([EB 2020/129/R.3/Rev.2](#)).
6. In order to address the feedback provided by representatives and to inform the revision of the guidelines, the Office of the Secretary analysed the lengths and types of documents presented to the Executive Board over a three-year period (2018-2021), and conducted a benchmarking survey on the guidelines and procedures related to governing body documents of other United Nations entities

and international financial institutions (IFIs). Pursuant to rule 27 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board,¹ the Board is requested to review and approve the proposed revisions to the corporate guidelines on governing body documentation as set forth below.

II. Proposed revisions

7. The revisions relate to the length of governing body documents and the treatment of annexes, and are intended to ensure that representatives are provided with clear and concise documents in a timely manner. A detailed table presenting the current and proposed word limits of governing body documents is provided in annex I.
8. In line with the principle of multilingualism, and to ensure linguistic parity and a level playing field for Member States' representatives, all governing body documents will continue to be translated into the four official languages of the Fund, as approved by the Executive Board in 2013 ([EB 2013/110/R.4](#)).
9. The review of the documents presented to the Executive Board between the 124th and the 132nd sessions revealed that certain document categories have a large number of annexes. To keep documents to a moderate length, Management proposes introducing a rule stipulating that the combined word count of the annexes of a given document should not exceed the word limit of the main text. The word limit of 2,000 words per annex, equivalent to approximately 5 pages, as prescribed in [EB 2013/110/R.4](#) would be lifted. Document originators would be invited to make use of hyperlinks to other governing body documentation and external sources of information in order to keep their documents concise. The high-level preview of the programmes of work and budgets of IFAD and the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) and the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) would be exempted from this rule.
10. As part of the revision of the guidelines, the Office of the Secretary is working with other divisions and departments to streamline and revamp the format of governing body documents, aligning it with best practice at other United Nations entities and IFIs. As recommended by the BPR exercise, a working group has been set up to review governing body document templates. Changes to the format that are currently foreseen include providing representatives with key information on the cover page of the document and introducing executive summaries as a mandatory requirement for documents of 3,500 words or above.
11. The following revisions to the limits on the length of governing body documents are put forward for the Executive Board's approval:²
 - (i) Country strategic opportunities programmes: from 5,500 to 6,000 words, equivalent to approximately 16 pages;
 - (ii) Financial status reports (e.g. the reports on the status of contributions to IFAD's replenishments): from 3,000 to 2,500 words, equivalent to approximately 7 pages;
 - (iii) Management responses to evaluation reports and IOE comments on previously evaluated strategies: from 3,000 to 2,000 words, equivalent to approximately 5 pages; and
 - (iv) Progress reports (e.g. on IFAD's approach to address the United Nations strategy to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse): from 5,500 to 3,500 words, equivalent to approximately 9 pages.

¹ Rule 27 stipulates that "[t]he Board may, from time to time, consider and prescribe, with a view to its most effective operation, guidelines for the interpretation of speeches and for the translation of proposals, decisions and documents".

² See annex I for detailed lists of documents by category.

12. It is further proposed that the word limits of the following governing body documents remain unchanged as they are deemed appropriate:
- (i) Financial documents³ (e.g. resources available for commitment, IFAD's Investment Policy Statement): 3,000 words, equivalent to approximately 8 pages;
 - (ii) Grant proposals: 2,000 words, equivalent to approximately 5 pages;
 - (iii) Information documents: 2,000 words, equivalent to approximately 5 pages;
 - (iv) Partnership agreements (e.g. memorandums of understanding): 2,000 words, equivalent to approximately 5 pages;
 - (v) Project/programme proposals: 5,000 words, equivalent to approximately 13 pages;
 - (vi) Policies, strategies and frameworks: 5,000 words, equivalent to approximately 13 pages; and
 - (vii) Results-reporting documents (e.g. the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations [ARRI], the RIDE, the President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions, and corporate-level evaluations): 5,500 words, equivalent to approximately 15 pages.
13. Word limits are also proposed for the following new categories of governing body documents:
- (i) Non-sovereign private sector operation risk notes: 2,000 words, equivalent to approximately 5 pages;
 - (ii) Strategic discussion with the President: 3,000 words, equivalent to approximately 8 pages; and
 - (iii) Workplans of the Office of Audit and Oversight: 4,000 words, equivalent to approximately 11 pages.

III. Recommendation

14. The Executive Board is invited to approve the proposed revisions to the governing body documentation guidelines as contained in paragraphs 9 and 11-13, which aim to ensure that Member State representatives are provided with concise, high-quality documents in a timely manner.

³ Excluding the budget and financial statements, which would be exempted from this word limit; the financial status reports mentioned under point 11 (ii); and the Office of the Audit and Oversight annual workplan mentioned under point 13 (iii).

Table 1
Revised word limits for governing body documents

Type of document	Examples (if applicable)	Word limit (number of words)	
		Current	Proposed
Annexes	-	2,000	Word limit per annex lifted and replaced by a rule stipulating that the combined word count of all annexes of a given document should not exceed the word limit of the main text. Exemptions: the high-level preview of IFAD's and the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD's programmes of work and budgets and the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE).
Country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs)	-	5,500	6,000
Financial documents*	Resources Available for Commitment, IFAD's Investment Policy Statement, requirements for the drawdown of Member States' contributions.	3,000	No change
Financial status reports	Reports on the status of contributions to IFAD's replenishments; status reports on arrears; IFAD's interest rates, reports on IFAD's investment portfolio, overview of supplementary funds received and capital adequacy reports.	3,000	2,500
Grant proposals	-	2,000	No change
Information documents	-	2,000	No change
Management responses to evaluation reports and Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) comments on previously evaluated strategies	Comments by IOE on the RIDE, response of IFAD Management to the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI), comments by IOE on COSOPs and other corporate strategies.	3,000	2,000
Non-sovereign private sector operations risk notes	-	N/A**	2,000
Partnership agreements	Memorandums of understanding.	2,000	No change
Policies, strategies and frameworks	Including on thematic and cross-cutting issues (operational or financial), and their action plans.	5,000	No change

<i>Type of document</i>	<i>Examples (if applicable)</i>	<i>Word limit (number of words)</i>	
		<i>Current</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
Progress reports	IFAD's approach to address the United Nations strategy to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse; the People, Processes and Technology Plan; Rome-based agency collaboration and engagement in the reform of the United Nations development system; South-South and Triangular Cooperation; status of implementation of the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility; and IFAD's wider operational response to COVID-19.	5,500	3,500
Project/programme proposals	-	5,000	No change
Results-reporting documents	ARRI, RIDE, President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions and corporate-level evaluations.	5,500	No change
Strategic discussion with the President	-	N/A**	3,000
Workplans of the Office of Audit and Oversight	-	N/A**	4,000

* Excluding the budget and financial statements, financial status reports and the workplans of the Office of the Audit and Oversight.

** These documents are currently not covered by existing rules.