
Report and recommendation on the review of modalities of formal and informal sessions of the Executive Board and its subsidiary bodies

Document: EB 2024/142/R.28

Agenda: 9(a)

Date: 13 August 2024

Distribution: Public

Original: English

FOR: APPROVAL

Useful references: Review of modalities of formal and informal sessions of the Executive Board and its subsidiary bodies ([EB 2023/138/R.10](#))

Action: The Executive Board is invited to approve the recommendation contained in paragraph 17 of the present document.

Technical questions:

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Report and recommendation on the review of modalities of formal and informal sessions of the Executive Board and its subsidiary bodies

I. Background

1. At its 138th session, the Executive Board approved the review of modalities of formal and informal sessions of the Executive Board and its subsidiary bodies ([EB 2023/138/R.10](#)). The proposals put forward by Management built on lessons learned from the changes in governance methods in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and aimed to streamline the Board's working methods related to the procedures in place for the review and approval of items, as well as the general proceedings of and participation modalities in governing body meetings.
2. Among the proposals put forward by Management was a new approach related to the approval of items in session: the batch consideration of items. The Board agreed that this approach would be adopted on a pilot basis for three sessions of the Executive Board, after which Management would report back on lessons learned and recommend a way forward.
3. The present document takes stock of the lessons learned from the implementation of the revised modalities, including feedback received from Board representatives during the April Board session and through Convenors and Friends' meetings, and puts forward a recommendation for the Board's approval.

II. Lessons learned from the implementation of innovations

4. In reviewing the proposals put forward in the aforementioned document ([EB 2023/138/R.10](#)), the Board approved various initiatives, as further described below.

A. Streamlining in-session deliberations

5. **Online review of documents.** While the practice of reviewing documents online through the e-board of the Member States Interactive Platform (MSIP) was already in place at IFAD, the Board codified this practice and approved the de-linking of items for online review¹ from formal Board sessions in order to distribute documentation more evenly throughout the year and allow greater flexibility for finalization of documents and review by Board representatives.
6. Feedback from representatives on the use of the online commenting feature has been consistently positive. In the latest feedback survey, carried out at the 141st session of the Executive Board, 100 per cent of respondents rated their satisfaction with this modality as good or very good and recommended its continued use. In an effort to facilitate forward planning and early identification of items subject to this procedure, at the 138th session, Management introduced a document for information containing a preview of the draft provisional agendas of the forthcoming two Board sessions, and upcoming items for online review. This document is submitted to each Board session.
7. **Approval methods.** A new approval/confirmation method was introduced, namely the batch consideration of items. This procedure, which was adopted on a pilot basis, replaced the use of the vote by correspondence (VBC) procedure to approve/confirm documents that had already been considered in other meetings

¹ Refer to paragraphs 6 to 8 of [EB 2023/138/R.10](#) for details on the procedure. Documents submitted for review through the online commenting feature include: standard and recurring financial reports already reviewed and endorsed by subsidiary bodies; progress reports; and country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) and country strategy and programme evaluations (CSPEs), which continue to be included for discussion in pre-Executive Board consultations.

(e.g. pre-Board consultations) and/or standard/procedural items.² While the use of the VBC procedure had streamlined in-session deliberations, significantly lightening the Board agenda, the procedure was resource heavy as it required significant follow-up on the part of both Board representatives and the Office of the Secretary to ensure that the majority requirements were met and that these items were duly approved/confirmed within the prescribed timeline. The use of the VBC procedure was particularly problematic in conjunction with the December Board session, given the proximity to year-end and financial account closures.

8. With the new approach, items that were previously presented for the Board's action through VBC are considered by the Board at the beginning of the session through a "batch" procedure. In consultation with the Chairperson of the Board, this procedure is applied to items considered unlikely to generate debate, which are clearly marked on the session agenda, including:³
 - (a) Standard/procedural items;
 - (b) Project/programme and non-sovereign operation proposals⁴ and grant proposals to the private sector already considered at the pre-Board consultations; and
 - (c) Standard items transmitted to the Board for action (approval or confirmation) that have already been reviewed and endorsed by subsidiary bodies or in other forums.
9. Items deemed to require discussion are not proposed for consideration through this procedure. Moreover, Board representatives retain their right to request that any of these items be given space for discussion during the formal Executive Board session, should this be considered appropriate.
10. Having implemented the batch procedure for three Board sessions, Management considers that it has significantly streamlined the work of the Board and Management by reducing the follow-up required, facilitating the year-end and financial account closures, and expediting communication of approvals to relevant parties. Similarly, representatives expressed a high level of satisfaction through the feedback survey on the 141st session, with 100 per cent of respondents rating their satisfaction with this modality as good or very good, and 93 per cent of respondents recommending its continued use.
11. Board representatives have underscored the importance of the timely posting of documentation for this procedure to work effectively, a principle to which Management is fully committed. During the pilot phase, while there was an average delay of three days in posting 56 per cent of the documentation for the first pilot session, 100 per cent of documentation for the second and third Board sessions was posted in accordance with the timelines established by the Board. Management will continue striving to ensure adherence to the timelines prescribed by rule 6 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.
12. **Time limit for interventions.** In order to promote the efficient use of time and provide all members with an equal opportunity to intervene as needed, time limits for representatives' interventions during sessions of the Executive Board have been introduced; three minutes are allowed for individual statements and five minutes for statements made on behalf of a group of Member States (e.g. List statements/constituency statements). These time limits are to be interpreted as a

² As specified in rule 23 of the [Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board](#), voting by correspondence can continue to be used when "action must be taken by the Board that should not be postponed until its next session but does not warrant the calling of a session of the Board".

³ See the annex for examples.

⁴ In accordance with the approval procedures for IFAD-financed project/programme and non-sovereign private sector operation proposals, approved by the Executive Board at its 139th session ([EB 2023/139/R.16/Rev.1](#)).

guideline; the Chairperson of the Executive Board has the discretion to extend or waive the limits during sessions for specific items.

13. Feedback from representatives on the use of the time limit has been broadly positive, with 93 per cent of representatives participating in the feedback survey on the 141st session rating it as good or very good, and 7 per cent as fair. The vast majority of respondents (93 per cent) also recommended its continued use. However, qualitative feedback was provided in two instances noting that the time limits could be further enforced.

B. Participation modalities

14. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in governing body meeting modalities across organizations, with a shift towards hybrid meetings. IFAD's experience is aligned with that of comparator organizations, with formal sessions of the Executive Board and its subsidiary bodies being held in hybrid format, with a preference for in-person participation given the associated benefits of stronger interpersonal relationships, trust and consensus-building among members. Hybrid meeting modalities are also aligned with IFAD's shift towards being a decentralized organization as they allow for wider participation by IFAD staff and representatives alike.
15. Board representatives have expressed appreciation for the flexibility adopted in determining the meeting modalities of the Board and its subsidiary bodies and have continued to express a preference for in-person meetings. Representatives and Management concur that, in general, virtual participation should be considered a complement to rather than a substitute for in-person participation in governing body meetings.
16. Taking into account recent experience and lessons learned, Management will apply the following general guidelines for meeting modalities:
 - (a) Executive Board sessions will be held fully in presence at IFAD headquarters,⁵ over two to three full days, with the hybrid modality available to those unable to be in Rome for the session. The in-presence modality is preferred for formal sessions of the Executive Board, given that strategic items are under consideration, in order to foster stronger interpersonal relationships among and between members and Management and, in the case of the April/May session, because of the proximity to the Executive Board annual informal meeting;
 - (b) Noting that participation in virtual pre-Board consultations was not optimal and there was greater engagement when participation was in presence, such consultations will be held in hybrid format. This will facilitate adequate and cost-effective participation of IFAD country teams and government representatives. Efforts will be made to schedule pre-Board consultations in such a way as to allow sufficient time for the review of documents, provision of feedback, and responses from Management;
 - (c) Informal seminars will be held in fully virtual format, with the possibility of being organized in presence and/or in hybrid mode should this be deemed necessary, subject to the sensitivity and/or particularities of the topic being considered;⁶

⁵ The [Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board](#) were amended during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure business continuity ([EB 2020/130/V.B.C.1](#)). According to rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, "Executive Board sessions may be held by virtual means when the President determines that holding a physical in-presence session is not feasible or appropriate for all representatives."

⁶ Board representatives may request that specific informal seminars be held in presence.

- (d) Meetings of Convenors and Friends will be held fully in presence at IFAD headquarters, with the option of virtual meetings should time constraints or other factors preclude meeting in presence; and
- (e) Meetings and sessions of subsidiary bodies of the Executive Board will be held fully in presence at IFAD headquarters, with the hybrid modality available to those unable to be in Rome for the meeting.

III. Recommendation

17. Bearing in mind IFAD's experience and lessons learned from the implementation of the revised modalities aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of governance processes, safeguarding the Board's ability to exercise oversight and stimulating interactions between Management and Membership, the Executive Board is requested to note the continued implementation of these modalities and approve the continued use of the batch procedure during sessions of the Executive Board, as described in paragraphs 7 to 11.

Standard items that can be proposed for action through the batch procedure

1. The below list⁷ includes items that are reviewed and endorsed by the Board's subsidiary bodies and/or the pre-Board consultations before being submitted for the Board's approval or confirmation, as well as standard/procedural items unlikely to generate debate. These items can be proposed for the Executive Board's action⁸ through the batch procedure, and will continue to be reviewed by the relevant subsidiary body or in another forum (e.g. pre-Board consultations) prior to the Board's consideration:
 - Corporate matters:
 - Workplan for IFAD's Office of Audit and Oversight in YYYY [C]
 - Financial matters:
 - IFAD's Investment Policy Statement YYYY [A]
 - Consolidated financial statements of IFAD as at 31 December YYYY [A]
 - Selection of the external auditor [A]
 - Operational matters:
 - Project/programme and non-sovereign operation proposals, and grant proposals to the private sector already considered at the pre-Board consultations [A]
 - Governance:
 - Proposed dates for the sessions of the Executive Board to be held in YYYY [A]
 - Dates of the country visits of the IFAD Executive Board YYYY [A]
 - Draft provisional agenda for the XX session of the Governing Council [A]
 - Invitation of observers to sessions of the Governing Council [A]
 - Other business:
 - Memorandums of understanding [A]
 - Cofinancing framework agreements [A]
 - Partnership/cooperation agreements [A]
2. Any of the items proposed for action through the batch procedure may be placed on the Board agenda for consideration in session at the request of a member or alternate member of the Board.

⁷ This list is intended for demonstrative purposes and is not exhaustive.

⁸ For ease of reference, each agenda item is assigned a letter to indicate the action required of the Board, as follows: [A] = For approval; [C] = For confirmation.