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Proposal for an in-person electronic voting system at IFAD

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Action: Further to the recommendation of the Governing Council that IFAD explore upgrades to the current electronic voting system, the Executive Board is invited to note the information provided on the upgraded in-person and closed electronic voting system and to endorse the submission of the proposal to the forty-ninth session of the Governing Council for adoption of the resolution, as contained in the annex, authorizing the use of the voting system, if required, for the appointment of the President of IFAD at the fiftieth session of the Governing Council in February 2027 and on future occasions.

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Proposal for an in-person electronic voting system at IFAD

I. Background

1. Following the first special session of the Governing Council for the appointment of the President of IFAD, held on Thursday, 7 July 2022, at IFAD headquarters, the Governing Council adopted resolution 228/XLVI in February 2023, whereby the Governing Council Bureau was requested to review the process leading to the appointment of the President of IFAD.

2. Among the areas identified for improvement were the voting modality and the counting process. Given the use of paper ballots at the first special session, the conduct of two rounds of voting had taken almost nine and a half hours, leading many delegates to call for reconsideration of the use of an electronic voting system to expedite both the voting and the counting processes.

3. In line with resolution 234/XLVII, adopted by the Governing Council in February 2024, the Governing Council decided "that the current established practice for 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".

4. Among the improvements identified and contained in the Report of the Governing Council Bureau on the review of the process leading to the appointment of the President of IFAD (GC 47/L.3), the Bureau recommended, in paragraph 37, that:

   "(b) The Secretariat be tasked with exploring upgrades to the current electronic voting system so that it may be used for the appointment of the President. To that end, such system should be in-person and closed (not connected to Wi-Fi/internet/external environment(s)), with the appropriate technical safeguards to ensure the secrecy and integrity of the vote."

II. Objective

5. The purpose of this document is to inform the Executive Board about the enhanced in-person and closed electronic voting system that could be used, if required, for the appointment of the President of IFAD in February 2027 and relevant future occasions. Additionally, it seeks the Board's endorsement to submit the attached resolution to the Governing Council for adoption in February 2026.

III. Guiding principles

6. Building on the online electronic voting system, which had been customized for the appointment of the President in 2021 and endorsed by the Governing Council in adopting resolution 217/XLIV, the Secretariat explored possible upgrades to the system that would ensure the principles of secrecy, integrity and security of the vote for an in-person election and discussed these with the voting system vendor.[1]

7. The findings show that compared to an online voting system, an in-person system is easier to secure and more user-friendly. It does not need to be integrated into other systems and is easily deployable. The in-person system identified would be completely isolated from the internet (with no Wi-Fi or LAN connection) and any other system or external environment. The casting of votes would be simple, and the

[1] Minsait, the company selected following a thorough and transparent procurement process, is a subsidiary of Indra Holding Tecnologías de la Información. It is one of the world's top consulting and technology groups, with 47 years' experience in developing electoral solution projects at international levels. For more information on the vendor, visit: www.minsait.com.

principles of secrecy, integrity and security, and verifiability of the vote would be ensured as follows:

(a) Secrecy of the votes cast ensured through the use of an advanced encrypted scheme.[2]

(b) Security of the voting process ensured through the implementation of a closed system not connected to the internet or to any other system outside of the voting infrastructure.

(c) Integrity of the votes cast ensured through the use of advanced internal digital signatures, cryptographic zero-knowledge proofs and blockchain technology.

(d) Verifiability ensured through immutable logging, which also allows for the printing of a receipt to confirm the votes cast.

IV. Voting procedure with the in-person electronic voting system

8. The in-person, closed electronic voting system closely mirrors the traditional paper ballot process, with two key differences:

- Paper ballots are replaced by tokens containing a QR code.
- Vote counting is fully electronic, which significantly reduces the time required for tallying results.

9. The key elements of the voting process are as follows:

(a) **Token distribution**
Each IFAD Member State receives a token with a unique QR code after formal identification of the voter. This code contains the Member State's voting rights and is assigned to the designated voting representative of the Member State.

(b) **Accessing the voting booth**
The voting representative enters the booth, which is equipped with a "hardened laptop",[3] not connected to the internet or any other system outside of the voting infrastructure; a touch screen; a QR code reader; and a thermal printer.

(c) **Authentication**
The representative scans the QR code using the reader. The system identifies the representative and grants access to the voting platform.

(d) **Display**
Once logged in, the platform displays the country's voting rights, a timer indicating the time available to cast the vote, the language selection and a button to access the voting screen.

(e) **Casting the vote**
The representative enters the voting screen, selects the preferred candidate and confirms the vote.

(f) **Printing the receipt**
After voting, a receipt is printed via the thermal printer. This receipt includes a unique verification code (only the first four characters are needed for verification).

(g) **Verifying the vote**
To confirm that the vote has been counted, the representative clicks "Verify

[2] An advanced encryption scheme means that privacy of information is guaranteed, that it is protected from hackers, and that communications or transactions are secure.
[3] In this instance, a "hardened" laptop refers to a laptop that has been specifically designed or modified to be more secure and resistant to cyber threats. The goal is to make the device more resilient to damage, hacking, data theft or unauthorized access. This is particularly important in situations where sensitive data are handled.

Your Vote" and enters the verification code. The system confirms whether the vote has been included in the electronic ballot box.[4]

V. Differences in the voting procedure

10. Table 1 below provides a comparison between the two options for the voting process: paper ballots and electronic voting system.

Table 1
Comparison between paper ballot and in-person electronic voting system processes

Main steps	*Paper ballot*	*In-person electronic voting system*
1	**Calling of country names**	**Calling of country names**
	The Member State representatives are called in alphabetical order	The Member State representatives are called in alphabetical order
2	**Moving to the table**	**Moving to the table**
	The Member State representatives move to their designated table	The Member State representatives move to their designated table
3	**Collecting the ballots**	**Collecting the token**
	The Member State representatives collect their envelope with the ballots and check that the Membership and contribution votes correspond to the votes to which the Member State is entitled. A number of ballot papers of different denominations are provided to ensure the secrecy of the vote.[a] Calculators are at disposal of representatives to enable them to tally the votes.	The token with a QR code is delivered to the representative.
4	**Signing for the ballots**	**Verifying the token**
	Once the number of votes has been checked and verified as correct, the representative signs for the receipt of the ballots and moves towards the booths.	The representative accesses the booths and checks the number of votes using the QR code reader to ensure accuracy.
5	**Casting the votes by using the stamps in the booths**	**Casting the votes by using the token**
	The Member State representative uses the stamps in the booth to stamp the name of the preferred candidate on each ballot paper.	Please refer to the background documentation for further details on the voting process using the token.
	The Member State representative puts the ballots in the ballot box and returns to their seat in the plenary.	The Member State representative casts and confirms the vote. A voter-verifiable paper trail can be printed as proof that the vote was counted.
6	**Vote counting**	**Vote counting**
	The ballots are counted in a separate room under the supervision of the tellers. Given the many different denominations (19), the counting can take several hours as the results need to be double-checked to avoid errors. Results are communicated	The tellers are given a portion of the electronic secret key[b] required to unlock the counting of votes in the system. Once each segment of the key is entered together, the system will count the votes and the results will be displayed on a tally sheet.
7	**Results are communicated by the Chair**	**Results are communicated by the Chair**

[a] Footnote 3 to rule 35.3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council: "In the case of paper ballots, each Governor shall be provided with one or more ballot papers each indicating a specific number of votes, which shall be so distributed that: (i) papers specifying any particular number of votes shall be received by at least four Governors, and (ii) the total number of votes specified on the papers received by any Governor shall equal the number of votes he is entitled to cast;…".
[b] The system uses the Shamir key share scheme.

[4] Note: The system neither records nor reveals the candidate for whom the vote was cast. It confirms only that the vote was recorded.

VI. Cost-benefit analysis

11. The cost-benefit analysis compares the costs associated with the paper ballot voting process and the in-person electronic voting process, considering both tangible and intangible costs.

12. Tangible costs (see table 2) refer to the direct, measurable expenses associated with administering each voting scenario. These include tasks such as preparing and distributing ballots, and counting the votes. Each of these steps requires staff time and administrative resources, all of which contribute to the overall operational cost.

13. Intangible costs (see table 3) are less easily quantified but equally important. They primarily consist of the time spent by Governors/voting representatives in reviewing, deliberating over and participating in the voting process. The opportunity cost of this time – namely what could have been accomplished had this time been spent on other governance or strategic responsibilities – represents a significant, though often overlooked, expense.

14. Table 3 below focuses solely on the time invested by the Governors/voting representatives themselves. It should be noted that many voting scenarios also involve the participation of other representatives or stakeholders. Once their time is factored in, the total time commitment, and therefore the associated cost, could be up to three times higher than that presented in the table. This underscores the importance of considering both direct and indirect impacts when evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of different voting processes.

Table 2
Tangible costs

	Hours	*Overtime hours*	*Number of General Service staff*	*Number of Professional staff*	*Total General Service staff hours*	*Total Professional staff hours*
Paper ballots						
Election preparation group (to develop terms of reference of task forces, select members and conduct preparatory work)	40		1	1	40	40
Ballot preparation group	12	6	10	10	180	120
Voting (inclusive of dry run)	10		17	13	170	130
Subtotal (in United States dollars) [a]					16 770	26 680
Total staff costs (in United States dollars)					**43 450**	
In-person electronic voting						
Election preparation	2	1	2	1	6	2
Voting (inclusive of dry run)	4.5		8	2	36	9
Subtotal (in United States dollars)					1 806	1 012
Total staff costs (in United States dollars)					**2 818**	

[a] The staff costs are based on average IFAD staff costs for both Professional and General Service categories. Any discrepancies in the totals are due to rounding.

Table 3
Intangible costs

	Paper ballot scenario (hours)	**Total for 180 Member States (hours)**
Hours spent by each voting representative for 2 rounds (based on the 2022 election process)	9.5	1 710
	Electronic voting scenario	**Total for 180 Member States**
Hours spent by each voting representative for 2 rounds (based on estimates)	4	720
Comparison of time savings		
Total savings (in hours) for each scenario for one voting representative	**5.5**	
Total savings (in hours) for all 180 voting representatives		**990**

15. Although the tangible costs of both voting methods are similar – each costing approximately US$43,000 – the in-person electronic voting system presents significant advantages when intangible factors are considered. One of the most notable benefits is the considerable time saved for participants. During a two-round voting process,[5] each member of the Governing Council could save approximately 5.5 hours compared to the traditional paper ballot method.

16. This reduction in time commitment not only increases overall efficiency but also minimizes disruptions to participants' regular responsibilities. Over time, these gains in productivity and convenience could lead to improved engagement and smoother decision-making processes, making the electronic system a more effective and sustainable option.

VI. Next steps

17. With the Board's endorsement, the Secretariat will submit this document, inclusive of the attached resolution, to the Governing Council in February 2026 for adoption. Prior to the Governing Council session, the Secretariat will also conduct a demonstration of the electronic in-person and closed voting system to facilitate adoption of the resolution.

VII. Recommendation

18. Based on the above, the Secretariat hereby requests the Board to endorse the submission of the current document, together with the attached resolution, to the Governing Council at its forty-ninth session, in February 2026.

[5] As occurred at the most recent election in 2022.

Draft resolution.../XLIX

Implementation of an electronic voting system at IFAD

The Governing Council of IFAD,

Recalling resolution 234/XLVII and the Governing Council's decision "that the current established practice for the process leading to the appointment of the President of IFAD be continued subject to the improvements recommended by the Bureau" as contained in document GC 47/L.3 entitled "Report of the Governing Council Bureau on the review of the process leading to the appointment of the President of IFAD";

Noting that by virtue of the decision above, the Secretariat was tasked with exploring upgrades to the current electronic voting system so that it may be used for the appointment of the President of IFAD and to that end, that such system should be in-person and closed (not connected to the internet or any other external environment(s)), with the appropriate technical safeguards to ensure the secrecy and integrity of the vote;

Considering the Executive Board's review and endorsement of the present report;

Decides that the selected electronic in-presence and closed voting system may be used, if required, in conjunction with the appointment of the President of IFAD at the fiftieth session of the Governing Council in February 2027 and that such a system may be used on future occasions when voting by secret ballot is deemed necessary.