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Investing in rural people

Update on a Proposal for an Automated Voting System at IFAD

Note to Governors

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For: **Approval**

Recommendation for approval

The Governing Council is invited to consider the present document and to approve the resolution contained in the annex.

Update on a Proposal for an Automated Voting System at IFAD

I. Background

1. In 2018, the Governing Council, at its forty-first session, 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” (resolution 202/XLI), as included in the 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).
2. 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 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.
3. The Bureau also recommended that the voting for the appointment of the President should continue to be held by secret ballot. This is one of the main requirements for an automated solution, in addition to ensuring confidentiality, verifiability and integrity of the vote, as well as implementing a secure system that minimizes the probability of cyberattacks.
4. In adopting resolution 202/XLI, the Governing Council tasked the Secretariat to “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”.¹
5. The Secretariat therefore submitted a proposal to the Governing Council in February 2019, which approved the recommendation that it “further pursue the process of assessing the feasibility of an automated voting system based on the principles contained” therein (GC 42/L.5/Rev.1).
6. Following the Governing Council’s approval, the Secretariat explored 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.

II. Objective

7. The aim of this document is to update the Governing Council on the actions taken by the Secretariat following approval of the proposal by the Council in February 2019, and to inform the Member States of the outcomes.

¹ 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.

III. Process

8. With the support of an expert on automated voting systems,² draft terms of reference were prepared and shared at a technical meeting on 4 July 2019 with Executive Board representatives for their comments. At the meeting, the Board representatives provided their feedback, which was duly incorporated in the revised terms of reference. The Board representatives reiterated the need for the system to ensure secrecy, confidentiality, integrity and security of the vote.
9. Following the technical meeting, the terms of reference for the request for proposals (RFP) were finalized and, with the support of the Procurement Section, the tender was launched on 19 July 2019. At the time of the launch, 25 vendors expressed interest and accessed the RFP documents; however, as of the closing date on 13 September 2019, none of the vendors had submitted a proposal.
10. To understand the reasons underlying the lack of proposals, the Secretariat, through the Procurement Section, solicited feedback from those vendors that had initially expressed interest. Some of the vendors responded that normally they provide services to national governments for election processes, which substantially differ from IFAD's requirements. The responses received highlighted the complex nature of the business requirements. In particular, vendors mentioned the requirements related to weighted voting rights, voter verifiability paper audit trail (VVPAT) and the need to break down the votes cast into several smaller denominations to ensure the secrecy of the ballot, resulting in the need for extensive customization.
11. In light of the above information, the terms of reference were revised slightly, without changing the main requirements of secrecy, confidentiality, integrity and security of the vote.
12. A new RFP was launched on 27 September 2019 and, as of the closing date on 18 October, one vendor had submitted a proposal. This proposal was evaluated by a technical panel, which agreed that as the vendor did not meet the minimum mandatory requirements the proposal could not be considered.

IV. Conclusions and way forward

13. As a result of having undergone the RFP process and further researching the solutions adopted by governments and major international organizations, the Secretariat has gained important insights:
 - There is a perception among vendors that the proposed IFAD contract would be relatively low in value due to the relatively small number of machines to be procured and hence not appealing given the complexity of the requirements and needed customization;
 - However, according to our expert, while there are no off-the-shelf solutions for weighted voting systems, solutions do exist that could be customized to meet IFAD's specific requirements – both cloud-based and non-cloud-based:
 - Under a cloud-based solution, the service would be provided by an external party over the internet, and the data would therefore be stored outside IFAD premises by a third party. Given the feedback received from the Executive Board, as described in paragraph 8 above, this is not an option for IFAD.
 - A non-cloud-based solution, on the other hand, would function in a closed environment (including both stand-alone machines as well as locally run network-based voting systems), considerably reducing the risk of hacking. This is the solution that IFAD intends to explore further.

² Prof. Dr. Dr. Robert Krimmer, Full Professor of e-Governance at the Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance within the School of Business and Governance at Tallinn University of Technology in Estonia.

14. With the guidance of the Procurement Section and the support of the Information and Communications Technology Division and the external expert, the Office of the Secretary will adopt a different procurement strategy, initiating a formal negotiated procedure as provided for in the IFAD Corporate Procurement Guidelines. The negotiated procedure is used for complex requirements, as an alternative or in addition to other traditional methods of solicitation when the previous two RFPs have proven to be unsuccessful for this requirement. This procedure will allow the procurement authority and the Secretariat to undertake a dialogue on requirements with multiple vendors simultaneously, while respecting the fundamental procurement principles of competition, fairness, transparency and integrity of the selection process. In this way, IFAD and the vendors would be able to adapt and fine tune the proposals to meet key requirements and achieve the best value for money. Assuming a positive outcome of the negotiated procedure, Management would be in a position to revert with concrete parameters for implementing a fully automated voting system.

V. Recommendation

15. As recommended by the Executive Board, the Governing Council is requested to adopt the resolution contained in the annex. In so doing, the Governing Council delegates authority to the Executive Board to decide, on the basis of information that Management would provide following a successful outcome of the negotiated procedure, whether the Secretariat should pursue the development and implementation of an automated voting system, for potential use in conjunction with the appointment of the President in 2021.

Draft resolution .../XLIII

Proposal for an Automated Voting System at IFAD

The Governing Council of IFAD,

Recalling resolution 202/XLI and the 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 41/L.9 entitled "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";

Noting that by virtue of the decision above, the Secretariat was tasked with exploring electronic voting or other forms of automated processes, with a view to reporting to the Executive Board for possible submission of recommendations to the Governing Council in 2019;

Further recalling its decision 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 document GC 42/L.5/Rev.1.

Having considered the review by the Executive Board of the update on a proposal for an automated voting system at IFAD at its 128th session, as contained in document GC 43/L.8

Delegates authority to the Executive Board to decide, on the basis of information that Management would provide, following a successful outcome of the negotiated procedure, whether the Secretariat should pursue the development and implementation of an automated voting system, for potential use in conjunction with the appointment of the President in 2021.