



**LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE AT THE IMF:
AN IEO ASSESSMENT OF SELF-EVALUATION SYSTEMS**

**ISSUES PAPER FOR AN EVALUATION BY THE
INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE (IEO)**

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The IEO will undertake an assessment of the self-evaluation systems within the IMF. These are the systems used by IMF Board, Management, and Staff to learn from experience and to incorporate lessons learned into their work. These include formal systems such as the issuance of reports reviewing certain operations and activities, as well as informal activities such as ex post discussions following the conclusion of an Article IV mission. The evaluation will also examine the framework used to glean lessons from IMF-wide reviews of policies, strategies and operations. This Issues Paper describes the scope, main questions, and methods that will be employed in the evaluation.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The focus of this evaluation is to review the self-evaluation processes in place at the IMF, as a way to enhance its learning culture. Learning from experience is important for any organization, and this is particularly so for the IMF given the importance of its mandate and operations to the global economy. In public sector organizations, evaluation serves as a critical element of the learning (and accountability) framework. It serves to draw lessons by assessing the results of activities and by determining what works and how. Evaluation also examines the effectiveness of policies, strategies, tools and processes, and provides incentives for change by establishing a basis for accountability.
2. Key to learning from experience, in the IMF as in any other organization, is to have good evaluation systems integrated into the regular work of each operational unit; these systems are referred to as self-evaluations. The IMF has engaged in self-evaluations throughout most of its history, both at the departmental level as well as IMF-wide (now conducted mostly by the Strategy, Policy and Review Department and in the past by its predecessor departments in charge of policy and review, as well as by ad hoc Working Groups). By its very nature, self-evaluation entails a high degree of ownership of conclusions and recommendations that may facilitate learning and implementation of its recommendations.
3. Since 2001, the IMF has added a third formal leg to its evaluation framework—the independent evaluations conducted by the IEO.¹ During the past decade, the IEO has issued 18 independent evaluations providing the IMF and the membership at-large with lessons on a wide range of issues, as well as providing a framework for accountability. Independent evaluations are intended to provide an objective perspective and frank assessments without being limited by internal dynamics as might be the case with studies prepared by the IMF staff. One important role for independent evaluation is to provide periodic assessments of the self-evaluation systems in their corresponding organization, examining the evaluation processes, the quality of the analysis, and the follow up in terms of learning and implementation. This evaluation is the first such assessment undertaken by the IEO, and as

¹ Before 2001, independent evaluations were conducted by ad hoc external teams under terms of reference approved by the Executive Board.

such, it will focus mainly on taking stock of the self-evaluation activities taking place at the IMF.²

4. This IEO evaluation will examine self-evaluation systems across the IMF. It will describe the processes that are in place to assess the successes and shortcomings in operations and activities (e.g., Ex Post Assessments³), how lessons are drawn and shared within and across units, and how these lessons are used to enhance IMF effectiveness. It will also explore how IMF-wide reviews draw on experiences from across the institution, how lessons are derived from these experiences and what systems are in place to ensure that findings and conclusions are brought to the attention of the Executive Board. Finally, the evaluation will look at what systems are used to monitor implementation of lessons learned. In sum, this evaluation will study how the IMF reviews its work and what mechanisms are in place to translate findings into learning and institutional change.

II. EVALUATION SCOPE, QUESTIONS, AND METHODS

5. This evaluation will cover assessments conducted by IMF staff of their own operational work and other activities, as well as evaluations carried out by the Strategy, Policy and Review Department (SPR) and Working Groups in their reviews of policies (e.g., surveillance, conditionality), use of Fund resources programs, country surveillance work, financial policies, training, and technical assistance. The evaluation will cover the period since 2006.

6. The following are some of the questions that will be addressed in this evaluation:

- **Departmental self-assessments.** Are self-assessments undertaken by each department? Are assessments done in a systematic way in terms of methods and periodicity? How are findings documented? Are there systems to draw conclusions and lessons that can be used to improve future work? What mechanisms exist to incorporate these lessons into operational work? How is this monitored? The IEO team will also examine whether there are informal systems that may play a similar role, in the absence of and/or in addition to formal self-evaluation processes.

² Periodic independent assessment of self-evaluation systems are conducted in many organizations. For example, the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank in its annual report, *Results and Performance of the World Bank Group*, monitors and discusses arrangements for learning and accountability across the institution, and makes recommendations to improve effectiveness and results.

³ Ex Post Assessments, or EPAs, are conducted at the conclusion of a program in countries that had had prolonged use of IMF resources. They provide an opportunity for the IMF to step back from continuing program relations to consider the economic problems facing the country, to provide a critical and frank review of progress during the period of IMF-supported programs, and to conduct a forward-looking assessment that takes into account lessons learned and presents a strategy for future IMF engagement. They are self-evaluation, in that they are conducted by IMF staff, even though they are undertaken by an interdepartmental team generally led by someone from outside the area department covering the corresponding country.

- **Inter-departmental assessments.** With respect to specific IMF supported-programs, the IEO will examine what has been the experience with EPAs and EPEs (Ex Post Evaluations of IMF-supported programs with exceptional access to IMF resources). Who conduct these evaluations? How its objectivity and quality are being assured? What systems are in place to ensure that lessons are being incorporated in future programs? On the assessment of strategies, policies and other activities, the IEO will examine how IMF management and staff decide on what assessments are undertaken by SPR and by IMF-wide Working Groups? Are these mandated by the Board? Are there other assessments beyond those mandated by the Board? How are Working Groups being organized in terms of staffing and reporting lines? How do SPR and Working Groups involve staff from the corresponding departments in the preparation of these assessments and in drawing lessons, conclusions, and recommendations? Are there mechanisms to monitor implementation in between periodic reviews? Is there an effort to monitor results, beyond monitoring implementation of recommendations?
7. The evaluation will gather information through a review of documents and semi-structured interviews with departments and members of the Executive Board.

III. WORK PLAN

8. Below are descriptions of work that will be prepared as inputs for the evaluation.⁴
- **A review of self-assessment in each department at the IMF.** This will document the self-assessment mechanisms that are in place within each department. The evaluation team will conduct interviews with staff in each department to explore if there is a formal process to assess its activities, to investigate how the process is implemented, whether it has any traction, and how it is documented.
 - **Inter-departmental assessments of specific programs.** The IEO will assess a sample of EPAs and EPEs.
 - **A review of self-assessments at the IMF-wide level.** This part of the evaluation will focus on IMF-wide self-evaluations conducted by SPR and by Working Groups. SPR has the institutional mandate for strategic planning, policy development and quality assurance, including the consistent application of IMF policies, instruments and practices. The evaluation team will catalog the reviews conducted during the evaluation period and consider how the IMF learned from these exercises and how lessons fed back into operations.⁵ The evaluation team will conduct interviews with

⁴ Related to this evaluation, and as background for a conference that took place during December 2011 to mark its tenth anniversary, the IEO is preparing the following three self-assessment studies: (1) an assessment of the processes involved in preparing and utilizing IEO evaluations at the IMF; (2) a study analyzing the evolution of IEO evaluations focused, inter alia, on the selection of topics, the methods used, and the type of recommendations; and (3) a status report on the implementation of IEO recommendations.

⁵ Again, the emphasis in this evaluation will be on processes, leaving for future studies the quality and impact of self-evaluation instruments.

senior staff in SPR to document the processes and understand the outcomes. In addition, the evaluation will also examine the role of Fund-wide working groups in learning from experience.

- **A review of self-assessment at other international organizations.** The IEO team will prepare an annex describing the self-evaluation framework in some other international organizations, including multilateral development banks. It will also discuss self-evaluation processes in place in central banks and/or ministries in selected member countries.