

IEO's 20th Anniversary Conference (November 2021)

Remarks by Moisés Schwartz

1. Good morning. It is really a pleasure to join you this morning and to take part in the IEO's 20th Anniversary Conference. Thank you, Charles, for the invitation. I'm delighted to virtually see so many IEO and IMF colleagues and to be joined in this panel by esteemed friends and colleagues. Kalpana, Alexandre, and Sean. I vividly remember all the conversations we used to have with only one purpose in mind. Namely, to make the IMF and the IEO stronger, more effective, and more credible.
2. In his presentation, Charles has already provided some background, numbers, and results of the IEO's second decade. There is no doubt the IEO has established itself as a body that supports the Executive Board oversight of IMF performance, helps the IMF to learn from experience, and supports the Fund's external credibility by increasing transparency about what the IMF does. And on the over-arching question on how the IEO can increase its overall impact on the institution, Charles suggests alternatives along the lines that the IEO could be more involved in the follow-up process to its evaluations, shifting the product mix towards more timely issues of current concern, paying more attention to integrity issues, or perhaps for the IEO to collaborate more closely with other evaluation offices on issues where the IMF is working closely with partner institutions. All of these are relevant possibilities that need to be carefully considered.
3. However, in my remarks, I want to bring the attention to another element that has not been mentioned, but to me, having spent 7 full years as Director

of the IEO, is the most fundamental element for the IEO's success. An element that still needs to be further developed. Some of my thoughts appear in a book I produced during my time at the IEO.

4. My message is the following: the IEO has basically two different audiences. An external audience that includes authorities in member countries, other international organizations, academia, and the public at large; and an internal IMF audience, mainly IMF management and staff.
5. On the external front, results are encouraging. While more can still be done, along the lines of Charles suggestions, and more outreach, externally, the IEO is credible and respected. I clearly remember the anticipation and expectation from external stakeholders on some of the most critical evaluations the IEO has produced.
6. Nonetheless, on the internal front, for the IMF to truly benefit from the IEO's work, the learning process derived from IEO's reports, needs to grow more naturally and organically within the Fund. That is, the IMF as an organization, needs to see the IEO more as a learning and useful device, and less as simply as an accountability mechanism.
7. Staff and IMF management have met many of the IEO reports with concern, anxiety, and defensiveness. Thus, shifting the IEO's emphasis more towards a learning device for the organization would go a long way in developing a culture that truly learns and benefits from independent evaluation.
8. Hence, the strategy I recommend has basically two elements. One rests solely on the IEO's responsibility, and the other on the IMF's attitude towards independent evaluation. On the IEO's side of the equation, while the two pivots of accountability and learning need to be both present in IEO reports,

the learning component in IEO reports needs to be emphasized. This would reinforce the learning objective of independent evaluation and ease the defensiveness from staff derived from the accountability pivot. That is, while the proper balance between learning and accountability would still need to be struck, the learning component should prevail.

9. On the Fund's part, the IMF still needs to genuinely embrace independent evaluation by creating a more open culture to learn from IEO's reports. And this needs to come from the top. That is, management needs to fully embrace the benefits of independent evaluation by creating an atmosphere and culture within the organization that is more welcoming to independent evaluation.
10. I understand the staff's attitude towards the IEO. While some staff are supportive, the staff at large tends to be defensive. This is obvious, staff tends to be dismissive of what it perceives to be an outsider suggestion on how it should do its work.
11. While Director of the IEO, I remember we held a seminar with some guests to discuss this same type of issues. Hector Torres, a former Executive Director, and friend of the IEO (maybe Hector is attending today) said a phrase, that stuck in my mind during my tenure as IEO Director. At some point in the conversation, Hector said the following: "*unsolicited advice is never welcomed*". And to me this is precisely the point here. Through its reports, and for twenty years now, the IEO has been providing unsolicited advice to the IMF. Hence staff defensiveness is totally expected.
12. Each one of us would respond in exactly the same way both in a professional or personal context. For instance, if an acquaintance tells me I should lose

some weight, my immediate reaction would be to ask him to mind his business, even though his advice may be the most appropriate one. Our own reaction in this case would simply result from the fact that we would see this as intrusive and as unsolicited advice. My point here is, that staff's defensiveness towards IEO reports is totally understandable and expected.

13. However, contrary to staff's response, defensiveness should not be IMF Management's attitude. Management must assume the role of promoting the IEO within the Fund, transmitting its usefulness and value to the organization, encouraging staff to apply for IEO jobs, and continuously being open to the suggestions and recommendations that the IEO provides to the organization. Management should adopt a positive attitude towards IEO reports, even if it does not agree with some of their findings and recommendations; make use of these reports to promote change within the Fund; instill positive receptiveness in staff's attitudes towards the IEO, and ultimately make the IEO's mission its own. Management's involvement is crucial, so that a culture of learning from independent evaluation within the Fund is entirely developed. Only then, will the IMF fully benefit from independent evaluation.

14. The IEO and the Fund are bound together, and they need each other for the successful implementation of their respective work. But this partnership still needs to be strengthened. The IEO has grown in stature and lent credibility to the work of the Fund. Its presence has enabled those outside the organization to see the Fund as becoming a more accountable institution, learning from the past, and adapting to new challenges. I have no doubt that independent evaluation has played a significant role in contributing to the

improvement of the IMF. A strong IMF requires a strong IEO. Let us then make sure that the IEO keeps being strong and relevant in the years to come.

15. I do not want to expand myself here. To me, the bottom line is that for both the IMF and the IEO to continue to excel, there is still some work to be done in reaping the benefits from independent evaluation. Thank you very much!