

## Self-Evaluation at the IMF: Overall Approach

10. This chapter examines the IMF’s overall approach to self-evaluation. It describes the different elements of self-evaluation, including the policies, guidelines, products, activities, and processes, in place over the evaluation period. It explores the extent to which these elements constituted an appropriate framework to ensure that self-evaluation contributed adequately to IMF operational effectiveness and legitimacy by enhancing learning and accountability, and it identifies strengths and weaknesses in the IMF’s approach.

### The Overall Approach

11. The IMF has engaged in different types of self-evaluation at the team, departmental, and institution-wide levels over time.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it does not have an explicit, institution-wide self-evaluation framework or an overall self-evaluation policy, nor a unit in charge of this function.<sup>6</sup> Rather, specific policies, practices, and self-evaluation activities have evolved organically as the IMF saw the need to review or change certain policies or activities or in response to concerns raised about its performance.

12. Starting in 2002, the Board mandated self-evaluation of certain *IMF lending operations*. It established a

requirement for ex post evaluations (EPEs) of programs supported by exceptionally large access to IMF resources; and in 2003, in line with an IEO recommendation (IEO, 2002), it added a requirement for ex post assessments (EPAs) at the conclusion of programs for member countries with prolonged use of IMF resources. From the inception of these requirements through end-2014, the IMF conducted more than 60 EPAs and 21 EPEs—covering about half of all IMF programs approved between 1999 and 2012 and completed by end-2013. Following a Board decision in April 2015, EPAs were scheduled to be discontinued in 2016; no change was made at that time to the EPE requirement. [Chapter 3](#) examines the quality and utilization of EPAs and EPEs.

13. Self-evaluation of *policy and other institution-wide issues* was conducted as an input or as a by-product of reviews that served as vehicles for developing or modifying IMF policies, strategies, and operations.<sup>7</sup> The evaluative content of policy and other thematic reviews is examined in [Chapter 4](#).

14. Evaluation of *capacity development activities* has taken different forms. During 2003–10, the Technical Assistance (TA) Evaluation Program served to inform the Board about the effectiveness and impact of IMF TA. The TA Information Management System instituted in 2005 provides TA departments with the tools to monitor and manage TA and external training. The IMF also carried out evaluations of TA and training activities; many of these exercises are driven by the requirements of the external partners that co-financed these activities. [Chapter 5](#) examines self-evaluation of capacity building.

<sup>5</sup>In 2000, an Evaluation Group of Executive Directors charged with monitoring the evaluation function prepared a report on experience with evaluation at the IMF. It also discussed the potential role and need for an independent evaluation office at the IMF to complement self-evaluation (IMF, 2000).

<sup>6</sup>The Strategy, Policy, and Review Department (SPR) coordinates the preparation of many policy and other thematic reviews that focus on strategy and policy development, rather than evaluation. SPR is also responsible for the “review process,” a highly structured peer review within and across departments to which all Staff reports are subject. This process is intended to ensure consistency and adherence to policies and norms, as well as to provide quality assurance at entry. But it does not constitute self-evaluation, since its purpose is to check work prospectively rather than to assess products or outcomes retrospectively to determine effectiveness, assess performance, and promote learning.

<sup>7</sup>In interviews for this evaluation it became clear that some Staff and Executive Directors characterized policy and thematic reviews as self-evaluation products (as was the case in IMF, 2000). As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), this evaluation differentiates between forward-looking tools aimed at policy development, and backward-looking self-evaluation that aims at learning from past experience.

15. As in most organizations, a great deal of *informal self-evaluation* takes place in the IMF. This report defines as informal those self-evaluation activities and outputs that were not mandated by or submitted to the Board. These activities were diverse and widespread, ranging from interdepartmental working group discussions to debriefing meetings at the end of a mission. Staff reported that these activities contributed to learning and helped to improve work practices. [Annex 4](#) provides more detail on these activities.

16. With regard to the overall accomplishments of the IMF, twice a year since 2012, the Managing Director has prepared and submitted to the International Monetary and Financial Committee a Global Policy Agenda (GPA). The GPA includes a list of indicators and ratings that assess the institution’s progress in advancing its overall objectives.

17. Self-evaluative activities and products varied in their goals as well as in the nature of lessons and their dissemination. Some products (e.g., EPAs and EPEs) were prepared with the explicit and primary intent of self-evaluation, while others included self-evaluation as one aspect or as a building block of a broader exercise (e.g., policy reviews). Some self-evaluations aimed at providing inputs for formal Board reviews of policy, while others examined the behaviors and practices of Staff and how to improve their performance. Most self-evaluative lessons pertained to IMF policy or operational considerations such as the design of lending facilities and programs; fewer applied to Staff roles and practices. The analysis and lessons from EPAs and EPEs and those included in policy and other thematic reviews were made available to member country authorities and in most cases disclosed to the general public. Guidance notes were used in some cases to disseminate changes in policy and operational practices to IMF staff.

## Strengths and Weaknesses of the Overall Approach

18. Unlike other IFIs, the IMF does not have an explicit institution-wide self-evaluation framework or overall policy to establish what needs to be evaluated and how, who is responsible, and how to follow up. Instead, its overall approach consists of a collection of self-evaluation guidelines, policies, tools, and activities that cover to varying degrees the core areas of IMF work. Although this approach facilitates the integration of self-evaluation lessons into policy development and other decision-making processes, it does not reflect

systematic strategic considerations about where to focus evaluation efforts.

19. The absence of an explicit institution-wide framework, as embodied in a self-evaluation policy, leaves the organization exposed to missing important lessons and vulnerabilities, and to a perception among some external stakeholders and Staff that the IMF does not value self-evaluation as a key learning tool.<sup>8</sup> It also leaves the self-evaluation function vulnerable to budget pressures and competing priorities that could potentially reduce its role and constrain its ability to raise sensitive policy and implementation issues.

20. The current approach does not provide a cohesive and comprehensive framework for self-evaluation. Indeed this evaluation found gaps in coverage and missed opportunities for Staff learning, and to enhance transparency and accountability. Among these:

- About half of IMF-supported programs were not subject to self-evaluation. While conditions for IMF support and program design across countries were examined in periodic conditionality reviews and in some ad hoc reviews of clusters of programs, the gap in coverage of individual programs has implications for both learning and accountability.
- There was no institutional requirement for self-evaluation of individual Article IV consultations (i.e., bilateral surveillance), either to assess the substance of IMF advice or the practices of Staff, although these elements were collectively examined as part of the preparation of the Triennial Surveillance Review (TSR). Since 2004, each Article IV Staff report was required to include a “brief assessment of the authorities’ response to key policy recommendations made in previous consultations” (and following the 2014 TSR, Staff is also required to report on changes in the IMF’s advice). However, the 2011 TSR and 2014 TSR found that only about half did so.
- Similarly, the IMF had no institutional requirement for self-evaluation of multilateral surveillance, although multilateral surveillance was assessed in the 2011 and 2014 TSRs. Also, the IMF commissioned

<sup>8</sup>In the IEO survey and interviews for this evaluation, IMF staff expressed skepticism about the priority given to self-evaluation and concern about the career impact of participating in EPA/EPE teams. For instance, 35 percent of respondents felt that supervisors focused on the work ahead without considering past successes and failures and only half of respondents who had not participated in EPA or EPE teams in the past were interested in doing so in the future.

periodic assessments of the accuracy of *World Economic Outlook* forecasts by external experts (see IEO, 2014a).

- Self-evaluation of policies and institution-wide operational issues was conducted as an input for, or as a by-product of, periodic policy and other thematic reviews. Thus, the analysis focused, appropriately, on the issues identified in advance for review and reform. As the primary focus of these reviews was on forward-looking policy development or reform, this arrangement resulted in more limited examination of issues not at the center of the reform agenda. Further, an April 2015 Board decision to consolidate some reviews and conduct most policy reviews on an “as-needed” basis, rather than on a set periodic schedule, reduced the opportunities for self-evaluation

that would take place as part of these reviews. This decision was taken with little, if any, consideration of the impact on self-evaluation or on learning and accountability.

- Communication of lessons in a way that promoted learning and improvement by Staff was found to be weak across self-evaluation products and activities. While EPAs and EPEs were widely available, little effort was made to extract lessons across them on a regular basis in order to inform future Staff work.
- There was no champion for self-evaluation at the IMF. No unit or senior manager or expert was charged with the responsibility to bring greater visibility to this function and build Staff capacity by sharing knowledge on evaluation methods and standards.