

Executive Summary

This evaluation assesses research produced at the IMF between 1999 and 2008. It focuses on relevance and utilization, but also examines technical quality and management. Research is defined broadly to capture most analytical publications of the IMF, ranging from surveillance-oriented output, for example, selected issues papers (SIPs) prepared for Article IV consultations and the analytical chapters of the *World Economic Outlook (WEO)* and *Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR)*, to more academically-oriented output, for example, working papers (WPs) and publications in external journals. These outputs comprised a large body of research, about 650 publications annually, at a cost of about 10 percent of the IMF budget.

The evaluation finds that IMF research was widely read, that it included a large number of high-quality and very useful publications, and that it was appreciated by country authorities and the research community. This was particularly true for the *WEO* and *GFSR*, but also for many other publications. Nonetheless, several issues merit attention.

First, the relevance of research was often hampered by lack of early consultation with country authorities on research themes and by lack of sufficient country and institutional context. Also, authorities indicated that some important issues, such as macro-financial linkages and aspects of monetary policy, were not adequately covered. To strengthen relevance, the IMF should conduct a periodic strategic review of the function and uses of its research product lines to establish whether they should be strengthened, redesigned, or discontinued. Consultation with authorities on research topics and discussions of results should become standard practice. Increased and earlier interaction with

authorities as well as longer country assignments by mission members would enhance the country and institutional context of research.

Second, the technical quality of IMF research publications was quite diverse. The *WEO*, *GFSR*, and external publications were generally of high quality. On the other hand, the quality of SIPs and WPs, which are not subject to a rigorous quality review, was lower and more variable. To enhance quality, adequate time and resources should be allocated to each research project, even if this leads to fewer publications. The review of research products should be strengthened to improve quality and to prevent the publication of low-quality products.

Third, many authorities reported that IMF research was message-driven, and many staff indicated that they often felt pressure to align their conclusions with IMF views. To enhance their quality, reputation, and utilization, working papers should reflect the results of technical analysis even if these are not well aligned with messages in surveillance activities documents.

Finally, there is a need for greater prioritization and coordination of research across the IMF. To this end, Management should designate a senior staff member, the Research Coordinator (RC), to coordinate research activities across the organization, including by setting standards for quality review processes and publication policies, to promote greater openness, and to address other weaknesses identified in this evaluation. The RC should prepare an indicative medium-term research agenda, in consultation with member countries and the Executive Board, and it should report annually to them on its implementation. This medium-term agenda should not be seen as excluding research on other relevant issues.