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EVALUATION UPDATE

IMF Technical Assistance Revisiting the 2005 IEO Evaluation

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IMF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: REVISITING THE 2005 IEO EVALUATION

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This report is part of an IEO series that revisits past evaluations. Reports in this series aim to determine whether the main findings and conclusions of the original IEO evaluations remain relevant, and to identify any outstanding and new issues related to the evaluation topic that merit continued attention. The assessments are based on desk reviews of IMF documents and interviews of IMF staff and members of the Executive Board.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AML/CFT	Anti-Money-Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism
AFRITAC	African Regional Technical Assistance Center
CCB	Committee on Capacity Building
FSAP	Financial Sector Assessment Program
ICD	Institute for Capacity Development
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
OTM	Office of Technical Assistance Management
RAP	Resource Allocation Plan
ROSC	Report on the Observance of Standards and Codes
RSN	Regional Strategy Note
RTAC	Regional Technical Assistance Center
TA	Technical Assistance
TACSN	Technical Assistance Country Strategy Note
TAIMS	Technical Assistance Information and Management System

The following conventions are used in this report:

- In tables, a blank cell or N/A indicates “not applicable,” ellipsis points (. . .) indicate “not available,” and 0 or 0.0 indicates “zero” or “negligible.” Minor discrepancies between sums of constituent figures and totals are due to rounding.
- An en dash (–) between years or months (e.g., 2012–13 or January–June) indicates the years or months covered, including the beginning and ending years or months; a slash or virgule (/) between years or months (e.g., 2012/13) indicates a fiscal or financial year, as does the abbreviation FY (e.g., FY2013).
- “Billion” means a thousand million; “trillion” means a thousand billion.

As used in this report, the term “country” does not in all cases refer to a territorial entity that is a state as understood by international law and practice. As used here, the term also covers some territorial entities that are not states but for which statistical data are maintained on a separate and independent basis.

Some of the documents cited and referenced in this report were not available to the public at the time of publication of this report. Under the current policy on public access to the IMF’s archives, some of these documents will become available 3 years after their issuance. They may be referenced as EBS/YY/NN and SM/YY/NN, where EBS and SM indicate the series and YY indicates the year of issue. Certain other types of documents may become available 20 years after their issuance. For further information, see www.imf.org/external/np/arc/eng/archive.htm.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2005 IEO evaluation of *IMF Technical Assistance* (TA) examined the process of TA prioritization and allocation, the effectiveness of TA delivery, and the monitoring and evaluation of TA. The evaluation found that IMF TA activities seemed to be driven primarily by the specific needs of Fund-supported programs and by new Fund-wide initiatives and were only weakly linked to key policy issues identified in Article IV consultations. It concluded that IMF TA had generally been effective in improving the technical capabilities of the recipient agencies but that there was significant variability in the extent to which they were able to implement TA recommendations; there was also limited feedback from recipients' implementation track records into future IMF TA allocation decisions. The evaluation made a set of specific recommendations to improve TA priority-setting, enhance the process of TA delivery, and monitor the impact of TA.

The evaluation recommendations fed into the evolution of IMF TA over the past decade. Many of the recommendations coincided with the requirements of donors who, since 2008, have been financing a larger and larger share of Fund TA. There has been a greater emphasis on demand-driven TA, which has improved country ownership and coordination with donors. Within the Fund, the demand-driven approach has been operationalized through the annual production of regional strategy notes and regular conversations between area and TA-providing departments and between these departments and country authorities and donors. TA departments have adopted various quality-control and self-assessment practices. And Fund-wide results-based management of TA is being promoted with renewed vigor.

The substantial progress notwithstanding, a few issues merit continued attention.

- *Allocating the Fund's limited TA resources effectively.* Balancing country TA needs and the strategic priorities of the Fund and its TA donors is a delicate task. The 2005 IEO evaluation found IMF TA to be excessively driven by institutional priorities and not sufficiently related to country TA needs. Since then, the Fund has given greater emphasis to demand considerations by systematically articulating country TA requests in the TA allocation process. In 2013, the Executive Board endorsed a new prioritization system that would give greater weight to the Fund's strategic objectives in TA allocation. Vigilance is needed going forward to ensure that the new system does not revive perceptions of IMF TA being excessively driven by institutional priorities.
- *Ensuring TA quality in the face of rising TA volumes.* Two areas that require continuous attention are: (i) whether the traditional practice of backstopping—i.e., the management and supervision by headquarters staff of field experts—remains a viable approach to quality-assurance under the increasingly decentralized model of TA; and (ii) whether efforts by the new Institute for Capacity Development to strengthen complementarities between TA and training lead to enhanced TA effectiveness.
- *Improving the monitoring and evaluation of TA.* Fund-wide results-based management-type initiatives to date have been complex and resource-intensive, and have been driven mainly by donors' requirements. It remains to be seen if the enhanced Fund-wide unified TA (and training) monitoring and evaluation framework currently in the works will do a better job of tracking progress on major TA activities and identifying implementation problems and reasons behind shortfalls.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. **Technical assistance (TA) is one of the IMF's core activities.** The Fund's provision of TA is anchored in the Articles of Agreement and is seen as one of the benefits of membership.¹ Currently TA is the second largest activity in the Fund after surveillance (bilateral and multilateral), accounting for about one-fifth of gross expenditures on Fund output (IMF, 2013a). The scope of TA is quite wide, encompassing not only capacity-building activities to support long-term institution-building in member countries but also fact-finding, diagnostic, and consultative activities that may be related to Fund surveillance and program work.²

2. **The IEO undertook an evaluation of IMF TA nine years ago.** The evaluation covered 1999–2003, the period immediately following a major Board review (IMF, 1999) that triggered reforms in the governance, management, and administration of TA. Against that background, the IEO evaluation assessed the relevance and effectiveness of IMF TA and derived operational recommendations to enhance the contribution of TA to the overall IMF mandate. The IEO evaluation of *IMF Technical Assistance* was published in 2005.

3. **This note revisits the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the 2005 IEO evaluation** (IEO, 2005). It provides an update on the main issues raised in the 2005 evaluation and analyzes developments to date, based on a review of Fund documents related to TA—including Board papers, internal memoranda, TA project proposals and assessments, and internal and external evaluations of TA—and interviews with staff involved in TA during 2005–2013.

4. **The note is organized as follows.** Section II summarizes the key findings and recommendations of the IEO evaluation. Section III describes and analyzes TA-related developments in the Fund since 2005. Section IV concludes with a discussion of outstanding issues.

II. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2005 EVALUATION

5. **The 2005 IEO evaluation unbundled the TA process into three stages—prioritization, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation—and asked the following questions:** How is TA allocated among countries and how are TA priorities identified within

¹ Article V, Section 2(b) allows the Fund to perform, upon request, financial and technical services, provided that these services are consistent with the Fund's purposes and that they do not impose any obligation on a member without its consent.

² Also, the legal definition and budgetary treatment of TA differ. Some Fund activities—such as non-mandatory Financial Sector Assessment Programs, Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes, and the Fund's involvement in the G20 Mutual Assessment Program—are legally classified as TA, but are not considered as such in the Fund budget and output classification.

countries? How effective is the process of TA delivery? What is the impact of TA, what factors contribute to its effectiveness, and how is TA progress tracked?

6. **The IEO evaluation found that IMF TA was well targeted towards low-income countries** and also positively associated with the country having a Fund program, the country being classified as post-conflict, and the availability of external financing. Overall, the volume of IMF TA, measured in person-years of field delivery, was considered relatively small vis-à-vis global efforts, but stable thanks to an increase in external financing.

7. **IMF TA activities seemed to be driven primarily by the specific needs of Fund-supported programs and by new Fund-wide initiatives** such as Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes (ROSCs), Financial Sector Assessment Programs (FSAPs), and Anti-Money-Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) assessments. TA priorities were only weakly linked to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers or with key policy issues identified in Article IV consultations. Medium-term TA planning was hampered by the short-term focus of the budgeting and resource allocation processes.

8. **IMF TA was found to be generally effective in improving the technical capabilities of the recipient agencies** although the delivery process was sometimes undermined by various factors such as: insufficient involvement of or interaction with the authorities in preparing the terms of reference and discussing the recommendations; inadequate dissemination of TA reports within and across agencies in the country; and weak coordination between the IMF and donors working in similar areas.

9. **There was, however, significant variability in the extent to which recipient agencies were able to make full use of their increased capabilities in order to have an impact on the ground.** Political interference, frequent rotation of officials, and a weak judicial framework were among the factors found in the evaluation case studies to constrain recipient agencies from using their new knowledge. The evaluation found that existing IMF practices did not adequately track the different stages of TA towards its final objectives and identify the factors influencing the lack of progress. Constraints to progress and ways to address such obstacles were often not candidly reported or discussed with the authorities.

10. **There was limited feedback from past track records in implementing TA into future TA allocation decisions.** This was partly due to poor documentation and monitoring of the stages of TA progress, as mentioned above.

11. **The IEO evaluation made the following recommendations:**

- (i) *To improve TA priority setting:* The IMF should develop a medium-term country policy framework for setting TA priorities, incorporating country-specific strategic directions and linked to more systematic assessments of past performance. The existing set of TA prioritization criteria (referred to as TA “filters”), which largely

focused on the IMF's core priorities and resource availability, should be either streamlined or discontinued.³

- (ii) *To enhance the process of TA delivery:* Greater involvement by the authorities and counterparts in the design of TA activities and arrangements for follow-up should be emphasized as a signal of ownership and commitment. Stronger efforts should be made by TA experts to identify options and discuss alternatives with local officials prior to drafting TA recommendations.
- (iii) *To monitor the impact of TA and evaluate the factors influencing it:* The IMF should develop more systematic approaches to track progress on major TA activities and to identify reasons behind major shortfalls. The program of ex post evaluations of TA should be widened and more systematic procedures for disseminating lessons put in place (Box 1).

Box 1. The TA Evaluation Program

The TA evaluation program was introduced in 2003 in response to a call from the Executive Board for information on the effectiveness and impact of Fund TA. It was organized as a three-year rolling work program, with a mix of topics each year including periodic external evaluations of donor-funded TA activities and thematic evaluations (internal and external) of sectoral and regional TA. The findings of these evaluations were expected "to be used in defining operational responses to future TA requirements, as well as in making more effective the collaboration with other TA providers and initiatives" and "to help inform the regular review of the Fund's TA policy and practices" (IMF, 2003). The Office of Technical Assistance Management prepared a report to the Board every two years summarizing the findings of the completed evaluations and drawing lessons for the management and operation of Fund TA.

12. **The Executive Board supported all of the IEO evaluation recommendations** (IMF, 2005a). Directors endorsed the recommendation that the Fund develop a medium-term country policy framework for setting TA priorities and concurred with the IEO evaluation on discontinuing the existing prioritization system (the TA filters). Directors agreed that greater involvement and ownership by the recipient authorities and discussion of options were crucial to greater TA effectiveness. Directors supported the need for better tracking of TA progress and candid reporting by staff on obstacles to progress; however, they cautioned against imposing conditions on members without their consent and using tracking indicators mechanistically for making decisions on future TA allocations. Directors highlighted the importance of integrating ex post evaluations into a broad strategy aimed at more effective TA delivery; they called on Office of Technical Assistance Management (OTM) to continue

³ The TA filters were nine criteria introduced in 2001 to guide the allocation of TA. Under that system, TA priority would be given to the IMF's core areas of specialization, main IMF program areas (e.g., crisis prevention, poverty reduction, etc.), key IMF policy initiatives (e.g., standards and codes, FSAP follow-up, etc.), regional diversity, external financing availability, and so on (IMF, 2000). The TA filters were aimed at introducing a supply-driven element into the TA allocation process during a time of high growth in TA demand. For an analysis of the evolution of corporate practices governing Fund TA over the last two decades, see Cortes (2008).

with the TA evaluation program and on TA-providing departments to undertake self-assessments.

13. **A task force was convened to make concrete proposals to implement the evaluation recommendations.** The task force proposals (IMF, 2005b) were broadly endorsed by the Executive Board in July 2005 (IMF, 2005c).⁴ The task force was replaced a year later by a high-level Committee on Capacity Building (CCB), chaired by Management, with a broader mandate to organize and oversee the Fund’s policy work in capacity-building. Since the 2005 IEO evaluation, the Board has discussed three strategic reviews of Fund TA—in May 2008 (IMF, 2008a), November 2011 (IMF, 2011a), and June 2013 (IMF, 2013b). The next section describes the evolution of Fund TA since 2005—including implementation of the IEO evaluation recommendations as well as subsequent reforms introduced by the 2008, 2011, and 2013 reviews—within the three broad organizing principles set out in the original evaluation, i.e., TA priority setting, TA delivery and effectiveness, and TA monitoring and evaluation.

III. TA-RELATED DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2005

14. **A key development has been the decision to rely more heavily on external financing for TA.** The Fund has depended on external financing to help meet the demand for TA since the 1980s but the reliance on external financing intensified after 2008. Due to the Fund’s restructuring, and in line with Management’s strategic refocusing at that time, internally financed TA was slated to be cut back substantially and a proactive external fundraising strategy was launched (IMF, 2008a). TA was bundled in “product lines” to highlight links to donor development strategies (IMF, 2008a). Partnerships with donors were developed on a broader, longer-term, and more strategic basis, focused on topical trust funds such as for tax policy and administration and AML/CFT, and on expanding TA delivery through regional TA centers (RTACs, Box 2).

15. **The expansion in donor financing has enabled an increase in the volume of IMF TA over the past few years, an increasing share of which has been delivered through RTACs.** This is evident from Figure 1 and Table 1, which show trends in IMF TA delivery. Across departments, most of the increase in TA delivery in recent years has been financed externally and currently over three-quarters of TA delivered in the field is donor-financed. (In dollar terms, donor financing is about 50 percent of the total direct cost of the Fund’s TA and training activities.⁵) As will be seen below, the expansion in donor financing has also affected all aspects of IMF TA—governance, management, administration, and delivery.

⁴ Two Periodic Monitoring Reports (IMF, 2007; IMF, 2008b) have subsequently followed up on the implementation of the Board-endorsed task force recommendations.

⁵ Field delivery excludes certain TA activities, notably, TA advice provided directly from headquarters such as desk-based review of laws and regulations and backstopping of field experts, and project management. The

(continued)

Box 2. Regional Technical Assistance Centers

RTACs are partnerships between the IMF (the TA provider) and participating countries (the TA beneficiaries) and donors (who finance some 70 percent of the operations on average). RTACs were originally established to provide TA to small island economies, first in the Pacific in 1993, and later in the Caribbean in 1999. Since then, the RTAC model has been extended to East Africa (in 2002), West Africa (in 2003), the Middle East (in 2004), Central Africa (in 2007), Central America (in 2009), and Southern Africa (in 2011); a second RTAC in West Africa is now beginning operations.

Each RTAC is governed by a steering committee composed of representatives of the IMF, the beneficiary countries, and the donors. The centers are run by a center coordinator (who is a staff member of the relevant IMF area department) and house a number of resident TA advisors (selected by the IMF TA departments) who deliver TA and training throughout the region on a peripatetic basis. The advisors are typically supplemented by short-term specialists.

Figure 1. TA Delivery^{1, 2, 3}
(In person-years of field delivery)

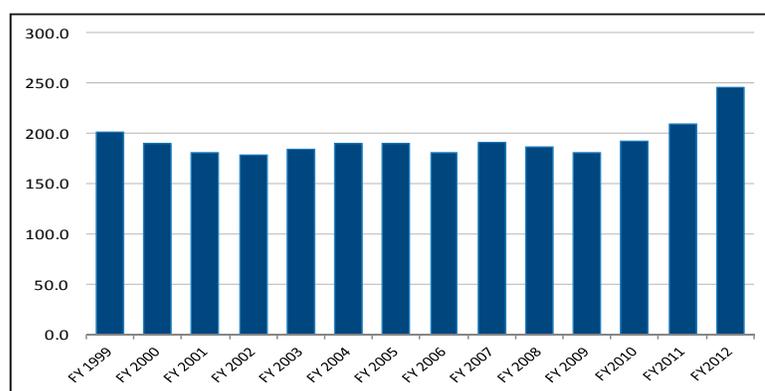


Table 1. TA Delivery by Financing Source^{1, 2, 3}
(In percent of total person-years of field delivery)

	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Fund-financed	56.8	58.8	58.0	49.4	43.4	46.9	48.7	39.0	35.6	28.8	27.9	25.5	22.5
Externally-financed	43.2	41.2	42.0	50.6	56.6	53.1	51.3	61.0	64.4	71.2	72.1	74.5	77.5
<i>o/w</i> : RTACs	4.6	4.7	5.7	8.5	15.5	16.3	18.5	25.0	29.9	34.5	36.8	36.7	33.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ICD.

¹ TA does not include training provided by the IMF Institute/Institute for Capacity Development (ICD).

² Field time only. Does not include time at headquarters devoted to backstopping; preparing TA missions, papers, and reports; and administrative and management support of TA activities.

³ An effective person-year of TA is defined as 260 (or 261 or 262, depending on the year) working days.

financing composition of headquarters-based and field-based TA is vastly different. See IMF (2013c) for an explanation of measurement issues related to TA and training.

A. TA Priority-Setting

16. **Significant steps have been taken to move away from supply-driven allocation of TA.** In response to the IEO evaluation recommendation to develop a medium-term country policy framework for setting TA priorities, area departments now prepare annual regional strategy notes (RSNs) outlining medium-term TA priorities for their regions, with more detailed individual country pages for intensive TA users and other countries as appropriate.⁶ The format of RSN country pages has been, and is still, evolving; the latest version includes information on country context, past IMF TA delivered in the country and achievement ratings, and the country's medium-term strategic TA objectives, priorities, and risks (Box 3).

Box 3. Do RSNs Provide a Medium-Term Country Policy Framework for Setting TA Priorities?

Our review of 37 country pages across all FY2013 RSNs showed that most provided an adequate thumbnail sketch of countries' medium-term TA needs and incorporated country-specific strategic directions reflected in the relevant surveillance or program documents. The more comprehensive country pages also included comments on capacity constraints, implementation risks, and/or issues pertaining to coordination with other TA providers.

Our findings are consistent with those of the 2013 TA review. IMF (2013c) found that the FY2013 country pages were a significant improvement over previous years, in particular in the extent to which short- versus medium-term capacity-development needs and priorities were identified and the extent to which progress in implementing past TA was discussed. However, IMF (2013c) also found that RSN regional overviews did not describe sufficiently clearly how prioritization was set within each region (among countries) and within countries (among topics).

17. **The TA prioritization criteria (filters) were discontinued in 2005,** as recommended by the IEO and the 2005 task force. In their place, the CCB endorsed the adoption of RSNs and their integration into the annual resource allocation plan (RAP) process, which was expected to strengthen the alignment of TA resources with other core activities and the strategic priorities of the Fund (IMF, 2007).

18. **The current TA allocation system relies on a consultative process between area and TA departments.**⁷ Area departments identify TA needs through their country teams, prioritize them according to their internal criteria, and convey the prioritized list to the TA departments. Different area departments emphasize different criteria but in general to date, priority has been given to low-income countries, program and near-program countries, intensive-surveillance countries, and fragile states—broadly in line with institutional

⁶ The initial response to this recommendation, proposed by the 2005 task force and endorsed by the Board, was for area departments to prepare TA country strategy notes (TACSNs) for countries in which TA was particularly important. Ten TACSNs were prepared in a pilot program in 2006, but they were found not to be helpful in prioritizing among countries and regions and were replaced by regional strategy notes the following year (IMF, 2007).

⁷ The main TA-providing departments are: Fiscal Affairs, Legal, Monetary and Capital Markets, and Statistics.

priorities.⁸ TA departments propose a work plan reflecting these needs while taking into account other considerations such as availability of staff/expertise and funding, donor preferences and/or restrictions, and countries' TA track records. The process is iterated until there is convergence, at which point the area departments finalize their RSNs and the TA departments finalize their RAPs consistent with the allocation of TA resources for the period ahead.⁹ The allocations are subject to approval by the CCB.¹⁰ The allocation system is more demand-driven than the pre-2005 system in that country needs are formally articulated in area department RSNs and taken into account in the RAP discussions. But it is important to note that the system is not, and cannot be, entirely demand-determined—TA demand typically outstrips available supply and other considerations such as those listed above need to be brought to bear to prioritize the numerous requests received from country authorities. The 2011 TA review noted that “most mission chiefs and TA coordinators believe that the process succeeds in setting priorities well-aligned with Fund objectives” (IMF, 2011a) and the Board agreed that the approach was appropriate (IMF, 2011b).

19. Have these changes in the TA priority-setting process led to “better” TA allocations? Figures 2–6 show the distribution of TA delivered over time by country characteristics, region, and TA department. Notable trends from these charts are: an increase in the share of TA delivered on a regional basis in Figures 2 and 3; an increase in the share of TA delivered in African and Western Hemisphere countries in Figure 5; and an increase in the share of fiscal and (to a lesser extent) legal TA in Figure 6.¹¹ Do these trends show that TA has become more demand-driven? It is hard to say. As noted earlier, the considerations for allocating TA are complex, involving both demand (country needs) and supply-side criteria (e.g., availability of expertise and financing and priorities of the IMF and its donors as TA providers/financiers), and there is no metric that can be applied to optimal outcomes. One thing that is clear, however, is that the availability of external financing, including through RTACs and topical trust funds, has accounted for a large part of these trends.

⁸ Some area departments have also given priority to countries that do not fall in the above categories but have capacity-building needs that are deemed to be large or important.

⁹ To allow for flexibility in the system, a “central reserve” of TA resources (currently 10 percent of the Fund-financed RAP, roughly \$1½ million in FY2014) is distributed and reallocations made during the year.

¹⁰ The CCB met two to three times a year during 2007–10, once a year during 2011–12, and three times in 2013.

¹¹ Beyond these trends, there have been no remarkable changes in the distribution of TA delivered across the broad categories shown—the share of TA delivered to small and/or fragile states has remained stable (Figure 4); the share of TA delivered to program countries has increased (Figure 3) as the number of Fund-supported programs has increased in recent years; and the share of TA delivered to low- and lower-middle income countries has declined (Figure 2), reflecting partly the increasing share of “regional” TA (e.g., through RTACs) and partly income reclassification of several TA-recipient countries.

Figure 2. TA Delivery by Country Income Grouping^{1, 2, 3}
(in percent of total person-years of field delivery)

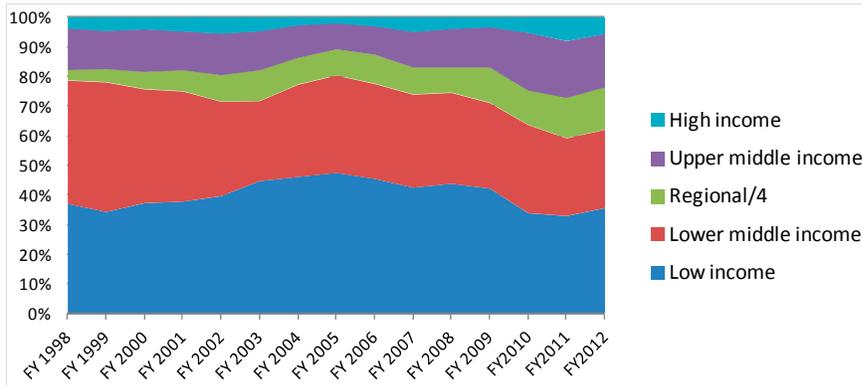


Figure 3. TA Delivery by Program Status
(in percent of total person-years of field delivery)

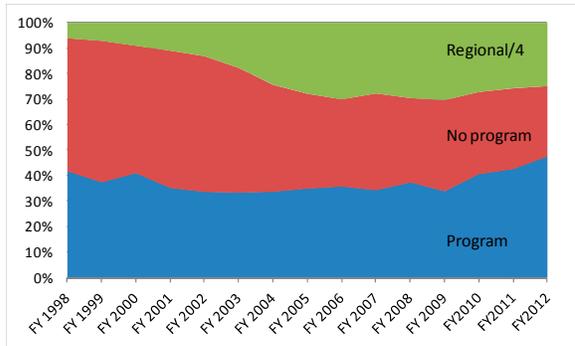


Figure 4. TA Delivery to Small and Fragile States
(in percent of total person-years of field delivery)

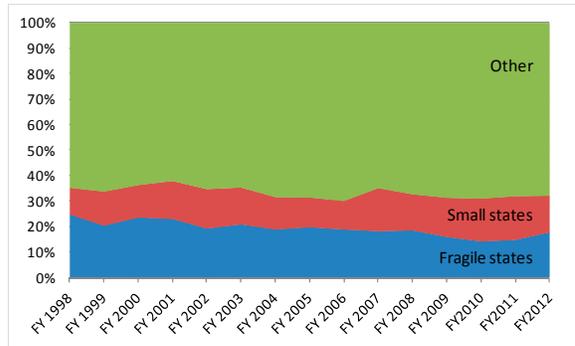


Figure 5. TA Delivery by Region
(in percent of total person-years of field delivery)

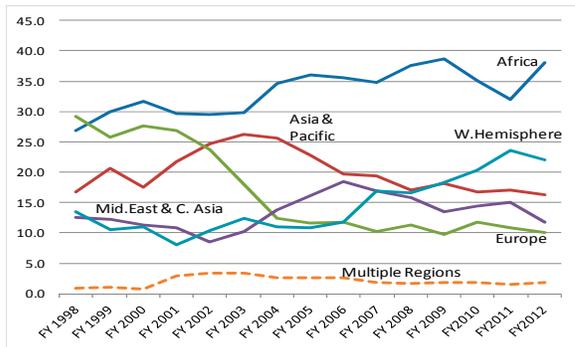
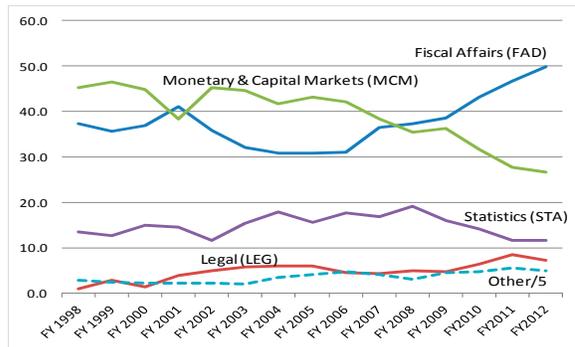


Figure 6. TA Delivery by Functional Department
(in percent of total person-years of field delivery)



Source: ICD.

¹ TA does not include training provided by the IMF Institute/ICD.

² Field time only. Does not include time at headquarters devoted to backstopping; preparing TA missions, papers, and reports; and administrative and management support of TA activities.

³ An effective person-year of TA is defined as 260 (or 261 or 262, depending on the year) working days.

⁴ "Regional" refers to TA benefiting a group of countries in different income groups or with different program status.

⁵ "Other" includes TA delivered by area departments and ICD.

20. **In 2013, additional changes were introduced to the allocation process to give greater weight to the Fund’s strategic priorities in the allocation of TA.**¹² The Board agreed that donor-financed projects should be fully integrated into the Fund’s strategic planning and budget process and endorsed the principle of a “two-level prioritization system” whereby the CCB would “complement the demand-driven approach ... in the RSNs by providing clear guidance to departments on institutional priorities” for TA (IMF, 2013b). Specifically, the CCB would use Fund-wide priorities to guide the allocation of TA resources across regions and topics (IMF, 2013d).¹³ While it is too early to assess the impact of these recent changes on the allocation of TA, vigilance is needed to ensure that the new system does not revive perceptions of IMF TA being excessively driven by institutional priorities—the situation that the IEO evaluation sought to change in 2005.

B. TA Delivery and Effectiveness

21. **Arguably the most important development affecting TA delivery has been the expansion of the RTAC model.** As noted in Box 2, the number of RTACs has doubled since the 2005 IEO evaluation. In general, RTACs focus more on practical and hands-on TA whilst headquarters-based TA staff and missions focus more on providing strategic advice. Being in the region, RTAC resident advisors are able to make more frequent follow-up site visits, which should help to keep up the momentum of reforms and solidify relationships. The RTAC governance structure is also designed to promote participating countries’ ownership and donor involvement—steering committees meet as often as every six months and are expected to “exert peer pressure on beneficiary countries to ensure that the TA provided by the RTAC is fully implemented” (IMF, 2006).

22. **Are the current quality assurance processes able to cope with the rapid expansion in TA?** As shown in Figure 1, TA field delivery increased about one-third in three years between 2009 and 2012—a significant scale-up in a short period of time, particularly following a major organizational restructuring that had substantially reduced staff numbers. The increased volume of Fund TA has been delivered mostly by contractual employees (resident advisors and peripatetic and short-term experts) with “backstopping” from IMF headquarters. Backstopping—the management and supervision by headquarters staff of field experts—is a key feature of Fund TA and the main practice for quality assurance and for integrating the activities of RTACs and IMF headquarters (IMF, 2011a). Some external TA

¹² In explaining the motivation for these changes at the Board meeting for the 2013 TA review, Staff stated that the allocation of TA across regions and topics was currently not done well in that it did not adequately reflect institutional priorities (IMF, 2013d).

¹³ At the November 2013 meeting of the CCB, the following four priority areas were set out: (i) crisis countries in Europe, i.e., Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, and possibly other countries where programs are requested; (ii) Arab countries in transition and fragile states; (iii) low-income countries and small states; and (iv) financial sector issues.

evaluations have reported that the backstopping model is coming under increasing stress due to the mismatch between a growing workload and shrinking resources.¹⁴ On the other hand, TA departments have recently begun hiring additional TA advisors at headquarters (backstoppers) using donor funding, although one area department has expressed concern about the loss of control over the choice of TA advisors in donor-financed projects. An in-depth evaluation of the issue of TA quality assurance seems to be warranted but is beyond the scope of this review.

23. TA departments are responsible for managing their own roster of TA experts.

The size of the roster varies by department, with the number of experts in the Fiscal Affairs Department—which accounts for the lion’s share of Fund TA—reaching almost 900 (about two-thirds the number of economist staff in the Fund). Some departments (notably, Fiscal Affairs and Statistics) have well developed and clearly documented guidelines and procedures for quality control of experts. All TA-department backstoppers use the online Expert Evaluation System—a Fund-wide application introduced in 2010—to assess and document the performance of field-based and other TA experts.

24. Satisfactory progress has been made in widening the dissemination of TA reports.

The IEO evaluation had suggested that greater dissemination of TA recommendations within relevant government departments and among development partners in the recipient country would help to facilitate implementation. Following the 2008 TA review, restrictions on TA information dissemination were relaxed and new operational guidelines were issued to staff outlining the procedures by which TA reports and advice could be disseminated within and outside the Fund, including to other agencies within the recipient country and to donors and other TA providers with a legitimate interest (IMF, 2009). To date all RTAC steering committee members have signed confidentiality agreements allowing them to receive TA information from other members. The debate within the IMF has now moved to the dissemination of TA reports outside the recipient country (IMF, 2013d).

25. The controversial policy of cash charges (“country contributions”) for TA, announced in 2008 as a means to signal ownership and country commitment, ultimately was not implemented. The IEO evaluation had considered this idea, and had concluded that the impact of charges on TA ownership and effectiveness was unlikely to be important. After much back and forth, in April 2011 Management repealed the charging policy in light of the success in attracting greater donor support (IMF, 2011c; IMF, 2011d).

¹⁴ For example, Murray and others (2009) and Murray, Abrams, and Vaai (2009) reported that the amount of backstopping has varied considerably across TA departments and that the backstopping model has been under more stress compared with 2005 because of the growing number of RTACs and budget and staff cutbacks. Similarly, Philipsen, Petrie, and Ugolini (2011), while giving TA departments generally high marks for backstopping, noted that “as a result of the increasing workload at HQ and a larger number of missions, the staff could not deliver, at times, prompt assistance.”

26. **Has there been greater country involvement in the delivery of TA since the IEO evaluation?** Based on evidence from Fund sources and external TA evaluations, the answer would appear to be yes. Staff interviewed in all TA departments reported a high degree of interaction with TA country authorities, from the initial request through post-mission contact.¹⁵ This is corroborated by evidence from recent IEO evaluations (Box 4). In addition, we reviewed various internal and external TA evaluations (see the following section) that made an effort to assess the degree of interaction with the local authorities, and the majority of these assessments were positive.¹⁶

Box 4. Evidence from Recent IEO Evaluations on IMF TA Interactions with Member Countries

Emerging-market country officials interviewed for the IEO evaluation of *IMF Interactions with Member Countries* “said they received more valuable input from technical interactions with the IMF... rather than from Article IV consultations” and that “[p]art of the enhanced value arose from the greater use of consultative processes with the authorities in FSAP and TA” (IEO, 2009). This evaluation covered the period 2001–08.

In a similar vein, country authorities who responded to the survey conducted for the IEO evaluation of *The Role of the IMF as Trusted Advisor* “unanimously praised” the discussions provided in the context of TA (and FSAP) missions during the evaluation period of 2005–11 (IEO, 2013). Almost all IMF TA/FSAP mission chiefs who responded to the survey said that authorities had been receptive (very or somewhat) to the recommendations/advice provided, and over 70 percent of respondents indicated that authorities had contacted them more than once after the end of the mission to follow up on the recommendations and advice provided during the mission.

27. **Similarly, coordination with donors and other TA providers seems to have improved.** The increased reliance on external financing for TA has meant that TA departments now spend much more time liaising and coordinating with, as well as reporting to, donors than was the case during the period covered by the 2005 IEO evaluation. We reviewed several TA evaluations (see the following section) that assessed coordination with donors and other TA providers and no major problems were reported.¹⁷ Several TA

¹⁵ Since 2010, the Fiscal Affairs Department has used a questionnaire to obtain formal feedback from country authorities on its TA missions. The questionnaire includes questions on whether the authorities were given sufficient time and opportunity to provide input into the mission’s tasks and outputs; whether the mission addressed all the issues agreed upon with the authorities; and whether the mission provided adequate time to meet with the authorities to discuss and seek feedback on its work program, findings, and recommendations. The responses have been highly positive, with average scores above 9 (on a 10-point scale) across the board.

¹⁶ There were a few exceptions. For example, the 2012 external evaluation for the AML/CFT topical trust fund noted that the Mauritius National AML/CFT Committee had limited its role to information-sharing or formalizing the IMF TA program, rather than proactively developing and driving policy (Woodbridge and others, 2012); the 2012 evaluation of fiscal TA in East Africa noted that the RTAC advisors had not been regularly invited to meetings conducted by the authorities and donor working groups; and the 2011 evaluation of banking supervision TA in Southeast Asia noted that the long-term expert in Vietnam had limited access to top management in the central bank.

¹⁷ An exception was an evaluation report on the East, West, and Central African TA centers (AFRITACs) that pointed out that these centers were “relatively passive regarding donor coordination” and that “some donors

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evaluations made the point that in countries where there were multiple donors working in the same area, the country authorities themselves took responsibility for coordination of TA among donors.

28. **In an effort to increase synergies between TA and training, in May 2012 OTM was merged with the IMF Institute to form a new department, the Institute for Capacity Development (ICD).** The 2005 IEO evaluation had suggested that strengthening complementarities between TA and training could help to overcome the constraint to TA effectiveness posed by low skill levels in recipient agencies. The 2011 TA review (IMF, 2011a) went further and proposed the merger, arguing that potential synergies existed not just in terms of knowledge but also in terms of fund-raising and locational economies of scale.¹⁸ The 2013 TA review (IMF, 2013b)—the first one prepared by ICD and the first one to cover both TA and training under a broader concept of capacity development—highlighted the new RTAC/training institute in Mauritius as its flagship experiment with TA-training integration. It is too early to assess the new department’s efforts to systematically harness TA-training synergies.

C. TA Monitoring and Evaluation¹⁹

29. **Work on creating an institution-wide standardized TA monitoring and evaluation system began as early as 2002** (see IMF, 2004). Conceptually, IMF TA would be primarily organized as projects, i.e., sets of related activities that generate measurable outputs within specified periods and contribute to achieving certain objectives in a so-called results chain. TA departments would use the results chain for project management and TA managers would be required to specify ex ante how the attainment of TA outcomes would be verified ex post through observable indicators. The web-based TA Information and Management System (TAIMS), which was being phased in at the time of the 2005 IEO evaluation, was to be the central repository for information on all TA projects and the Fund’s principal information tool for TA monitoring; this was endorsed by the Board in 2005 (IMF, 2005c).

30. **Progress in implementing results-based management of TA has been slow.**²⁰ Staff initially resisted making the change from focusing on the quality of TA inputs to focusing on

complained about a lack of knowledge of AFRITAC operations and coordination between their organizations and the AFRITACs” (Murray and others, 2009).

¹⁸ Board support for this proposal was lukewarm. Many Directors were cautiously open to considering the merger but a number of Directors were unconvinced, given the distinctive roles and audiences for the two activities (IMF, 2011b).

¹⁹ See Selowsky and Tan (forthcoming) for more on self-assessment of capacity-development activities in the Fund.

²⁰ Results-based management is a performance management strategy that aims to achieve better results (improve performance) through continuously measuring and reporting on performance. It is based on four main pillars: (i) the definition of strategic goals which provide a focus for action; (ii) the specification of expected

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tangible TA results, and TAIMS implementation was hindered by conceptual disagreements, usability issues, and high costs (IMF, 2008a). But the increased reliance on external financing for TA, with concomitant obligations for reporting to donors, provided a renewed stimulus to these efforts. A working group was established in 2010 to develop an enhanced Fund-wide results-based management framework (see IMF, 2011e); a successor working group is now in charge of operationalizing the recommendations (IMF, 2013b).

31. **At present, all externally financed TA projects are documented in the TAIMS.** Our review of a sample of these projects found that the system seemed more conducive to generating quick donor reports than providing information for TA monitoring (Box 5). It is important to note that TAIMS documentation typically ends when the project (funding) ends. The self-assessments in the TAIMS, therefore, capture only the extent to which the relatively narrowly defined project outcome was achieved, i.e., the extent to which the technical capacity of the TA-receiving agency was improved. A key emphasis of the 2005 IEO evaluation, however, was that understanding the factors contributing to or detracting from the effectiveness and impact of TA—i.e., whether the TA-receiving agency was making effective use of its increased technical capacity to have an impact on the ground—is crucial for learning and making decisions about future TA to that country.²¹ Such information is typically only available well after a project (or, in many cases, a sequence of projects) has ended—particularly where there are lags between the acceptance of TA recommendations and their adoption, and lags between the adoption of TA recommendations and their impact.

32. **The Fund-wide TA evaluation program has been dormant since 2010 when it last reported to the Board; however, ex post evaluations of TA have continued to take place in individual departments.** Mandated evaluations of RTACs and TA activities financed by topical trust funds are conducted once per (typically five-year) funding cycle by external evaluators procured by ICD (previously by OTM). ICD also commissions periodic external evaluations of TA financed by large bilateral donors. In addition, TA departments have undertaken selected thematic, country- or region-specific ex post evaluations on an ad hoc basis using their own staff and/or external consultants, and two departments (Monetary and Capital Markets and Statistics) have committed to continuing to undertake two to three such evaluations a year. As noted above, much of the impact of TA takes time to unfold and may not be adequately captured in the TAIMS project monitoring framework; ex

results which contribute to these goals and align programs, processes and resources behind them; (iii) ongoing monitoring and assessment of performance, integrating lessons learnt into future planning; and (iv) improved accountability, based on continuous feedback to improve performance (<http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/RBMConceptsMethodgyjuly2002.pdf>).

²¹ A similar point was made in the IEO evaluation of *IMF Interactions with Member Countries*, where it was mentioned that “some interviewed officials, noting the very large quantities of IMF technical assistance that had been provided, questioned its results in terms of sustained improvements in local capacity. This raises an issue about the programming of technical assistance and ... how the strategy for technical assistance reflects country track records in following through on past assistance” (IEO, 2009).

post evaluations could in principle help to fill this gap. Our review of a sample of recent ex post TA evaluations found some examples of best practices (Box 6). The Fiscal Affairs Department’s new initiative to translate lessons from a recent ex post TA evaluation into a concrete departmental action plan to enhance TA traction is also a promising development.

Box 5. Is the TAIMS an Effective Vehicle for Tracking TA Progress?

We reviewed the documentation for a sample of 21 recently completed externally funded TA projects drawn from the TAIMS. The sample included TA projects by four departments (Fiscal Affairs, Legal, Monetary and Capital Markets, and Statistics), spanning a range of durations (roughly 6–18 months) and modalities. We looked at how well the projects were defined at the proposal stage, how well progress was documented, and how well the projects were assessed upon completion.

- Project proposals follow a standardized format that requires specification of the objective(s) and expected outcome(s), with associated verifiable indicators and expected completion dates. The TAIMS guidelines do not require project managers to specify intermediate steps and IMF (2011e) recommends that milestones be specified only for projects of 18 months or longer. Nonetheless, for projects involving more than two missions or activities, it seems reasonable to expect the activities and verifiable indicators to be laid out in a logical sequence towards the final outcome(s) and this is what we looked for in our review. On the whole, about two-thirds of the projects we reviewed described a reasonably clear progression.
- Evidence of within-project monitoring was generally scarce. Even taking into consideration the huge variation in the length and types of TA projects in TAIMS, there were only a handful of projects that we found to be properly documented from beginning to end. In the majority of cases, intervening reports such as mission briefing papers and back-to-office (BTO) reports and interim project assessments, were either missing from the TAIMS or incomplete. The tasks described in the briefing papers and BTO reports, where they could be found, were not always well connected to the objectives and outcomes in the project proposal.
- Final project assessments follow a standardized format that requires assignment of an achievement rating and explanatory comments for each verifiable indicator specified in the proposal. On the whole, about three-fifths of the projects we reviewed had complete and candid final assessments at the point when the project activities were closed.

33. **In some departments, efforts have also been made separately from ex post evaluations to track country progress in TA implementation and link it to TA prioritization but at the Fund-wide level, this remains a work in progress.** The Statistics and Legal Departments adopt a formal “traction means action” approach, requiring TA missions to agree on benchmark actions to be taken by the authorities, with progress in implementing these actions serving as the basis for considering follow-up TA projects. At the Fund-wide level, for countries that are intensive TA users, area departments are required to assign numerical achievement ratings—overall and in individual TA areas—in their RSN pages, accompanied by a brief write-up of implementation progress based on input from resident representatives and TA departments. Our review of the FY2013 RSN country pages found great variation in the information content of these ratings and write-ups. No explicit links are drawn between the achievement ratings and country prioritization for TA.

Box 6. Do Ex Post Evaluations Shed Light on Factors that Help or Hinder the Effectiveness and Impact of TA?

We examined 17 ex post evaluations completed during the last 3 years, including 10 evaluations commissioned by TA departments and 7 evaluations commissioned by OTM/ICD. The evaluations were undertaken for different purposes and differed substantially in focus and execution. Almost all of the evaluations were based on a survey of country officials and stakeholders, a review of IMF documentation, and interviews with TA providers, recipients, and donors in selected country visits.¹

The ex post evaluations commissioned by OTM/ICD were mainly for reporting to donors. Because these evaluations typically covered a large number of projects across many areas and countries over a relatively short time span, they were less likely to speak to the effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the TA under review. Within this group, the 2011 *Evaluation of the Japanese Technical Assistance Subaccount* stood out as a particularly thorough and thoughtful exercise that devoted an entire chapter to discussing successful versus less successful TA projects in the countries visited.

The ex post evaluations by TA departments were undertaken more for learning purposes. They focused on one theme (e.g., banking reform, revenue administration, macroeconomic statistics, etc.) in a country or group of countries with a longer time perspective (up to 20 years). Some of them focused solely on the technical quality of the advice provided (inputs), but others examined TA outcomes and impact and these evaluations were better able to document the overall results chain, particularly factors that may have influenced the ability of the recipient agencies to follow through on the TA received. We found a few examples of well carried-out evaluations that could serve as models for future work, namely the evaluations of tax administration TA in Mozambique (2009) and fiscal TA in East Africa (2013); the evaluations of banking sector TA in Nigeria (2011) and in Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama (2012); and the evaluations of statistics TA in Albania and Georgia (2011) and in Peru (2012).

¹ A number of evaluations complained about the lack of a clearly specified results chain, insufficient monitoring, and/or incomplete documentation.

IV. OUTSTANDING ISSUES

34. **The 2005 IEO evaluation has fed into an ongoing evolution of how the IMF organizes and engages in TA over the past decade.** Many of the IEO evaluation recommendations—as well as the recommendations of subsequent strategic TA reviews undertaken by the Fund—coincided with the requirements of donors who, since 2008, have been financing a larger and larger share of Fund TA. Demand-driven TA has been recognized as critical to improved country ownership of TA and coordination with donors. Within the Fund, the demand-driven approach has been operationalized through the annual production of RSNs and regular conversations between area and TA departments and between these departments and country authorities and donors. Results-based management of TA is being promoted with renewed vigor, despite difficulties in earlier trials.

35. **The substantial progress notwithstanding, a few issues merit continued attention.**

- (i) *Allocating the Fund's TA resources effectively.* Balancing country TA needs and the strategic priorities of the Fund and its TA donors is a delicate task. The 2005 IEO evaluation found that IMF TA seemed to be driven primarily by Fund initiatives and

- priorities and was not sufficiently related to country TA needs and demands emanating from surveillance consultations. After 2005, the Fund moved towards giving more weight to demand considerations by articulating country TA needs through area department RSNs. TA demands, which invariably exceed the available supply, are then prioritized and allocated through interdepartmental consultations that also take into account available expertise, financing, and institutional and donor priorities. In 2013 the Executive Board endorsed a new prioritization system that would give greater weight to the Fund's strategic objectives in TA allocation. It is important that the new system not revive perceptions of IMF TA being excessively driven by institutional priorities relative to demand-driven country needs.
- (ii) *Ensuring TA quality in the face of rising TA volumes.* The rapid scale-up of donor-financed Fund TA in recent years has been welcomed by many TA recipients but has also raised challenges for the Fund on how to maintain quality. Two developments are worth keeping an eye on. First, backstopping—the management and supervision by headquarters staff of field experts—has traditionally been a key feature of Fund TA but there are indications that this model has been coming under increasing stress. Will the backstopping approach to TA quality assurance hold up now that the decentralized (RTAC) model of TA has been expanded further? Second, a new department, ICD, was created in May 2012 with the mandate to enable stronger synergies and better coordination between IMF TA and training. Attention should be paid to ICD's efforts to strengthen complementarities between TA and training and their results on TA effectiveness.
- (iii) *Improving the monitoring and evaluation of TA.* Fund-wide results-based management-type initiatives to date have been complex and resource-intensive, and compliance has been driven mainly by donors' requirements. Work is ongoing to implement an enhanced Fund-wide results-based management framework for TA and training. Given the huge diversity of TA projects undertaken by the Fund, and the difficulties that other organizations have experienced in implementing results-based management with complex outputs and outcomes, it remains to be seen if the enhanced Fund-wide unified TA and training monitoring and evaluation framework will do a better job of tracking progress on major TA activities and identifying problems and reasons behind shortfalls.

36. **Should the IEO consider a new evaluation of TA in the coming years?** Much has changed, and continues to change, in TA governance, management, administration, and delivery, since the 2005 IEO evaluation. In fact, even the concept of TA has changed during the past year, as it becomes integrated with training under the broader function of capacity development. There may be a case for a deeper examination, three or four years from now, of how these changes have affected the relevance, quality, and effectiveness of Fund TA (and capacity development more generally) than this more limited exercise has been able to provide.

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