

2015 Guidelines on the IMF Staff Engagement with Civil Society Organizations

Table of Contents:

Introduction	2
I. Engagement with CSOs	5
II. Country-Level, Regional, and Global Engagement with CSOs.....	8
A. Country Missions and Staff Visits.....	8
B. Global and Regional Engagement.....	11
III. Public Consultations for Policy and Strategy papers.....	13
A. Conducting Public Consultations	14
B. Conducting Targeted Consultations.....	16
Appendix I: Methodology and Background.....	17

2015 Staff Guidelines on IMF Staff Engagement with Civil Society Organizations¹

Civil society organizations (CSOs)² have become significant players in global economic governance since the 1990s. Many CSOs see themselves as representing the broad public interest and as having a role in ensuring that individuals participate directly in shaping the rules of the their economic system. Some are experts in economic issues and their influence expands to parliaments and governments.

This guidance note aims to provide staff with the tools to further develop and maintain meaningful relationships with CSOs. The paper builds on the 2003 guidelines to provide general principles and best practices for IMF staff on how to prepare and undertake such activities in a constructive and systematic way.

Introduction

1. Engagement with CSOs can enhance and translate IMF policy advice to member governments into successful policy.³ The IMF recognizes the benefits from a transparent and wide engagement with CSOs, as means of improving its policy advice and analysis, as well as enhancing support for reforms and deepening country ownership.⁴ More generally, engagement with external stakeholders, including interactions with CSOs, is an integral part of IMF country and policy work. As a public institution, the IMF is committed to being transparent about its work and to explaining itself to the people whom it affects. Dialogue with CSOs offers important opportunities to gather broader perspectives about the impact of Fund's work, and to dispel public misconceptions regarding the IMF and its activities. At the same time, the IMF remains accountable to its member governments. While dialogue

¹ The IMF acknowledges with gratitude the integral role of Ms. Bessma Momani, Senior Fellow at the Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) in the preparation of this guidance note. The guidance note was drafted by a team led by Ms. Nisreen Farhan, comprising Ms. Karla Chaman, Mr. McAntony, and Mr. Dezhi Ma (all IMF staff). The guidance note was prepared in consultations with civil society representatives and IMF staff. Thanks are also due to Ms. Sabina Bhatia for her guidance throughout the process.

² Civil Society Organizations can include nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), business forums, faith-based organizations, labor and professional organizations, local community groups, philanthropic and charitable organizations, gender and women's associations, social movements (including representatives of the informal sector and rural areas), academics, research centers and think tanks. CSOs can be concerned with a country, a region, or have a global operation. Groups such as the mass media, political parties, and parliamentarians fall outside the scope of civil society, although they are also important for IMF outreach in their own right.

³ Dialogue with civil society groups is only one part of the IMF's public outreach strategy. Other elements of equal importance include IMF contacts with parliamentarians, politicians, labor unions, mass media, and citizens at large.

⁴ The IMF's Executive Board reviewed the IMF's external communications strategy in July 2014. During that review, Directors expressed their views on relations with civil society organizations, among other issues, which are reflected in Press Release No. 14/387.

with and transparency towards citizens represent important complements to this accountability, IMF staff relations with CSOs cannot substitute for the government's own responsibilities for engagement with civil society. Generally, staff should always encourage CSOs to take their views and proposals to their relevant national authorities.

2. Many CSOs now see the IMF as more open and transparent, but IMF staff follow-up on engagement with CSOs still falls short of expectations. In a 2013 survey conducted for the purpose of updating the existing 2003 CSO guidelines, it was shown that the majority of surveyed CSOs (63 percent) believe that the IMF is now more open and transparent than before. Moreover, 82 percent have had positive/neutral experiences engaging with the IMF, and find that great strides have been made in IMF staff openness to listen and discuss ideas with their CSO counterparts. At the same time, however, CSOs also find engagement with IMF staff to be either too rushed or too technical, and many (59 percent) also believed that IMF staff does not effectively follow up on their engagement with CSOs and often do not take CSO viewpoints into account in shaping IMF decisions. CSOs strongly felt that they are consulted late in the IMF staff decision-making process and engagement often offered window-dressing rather than substantive input into policy strategy, analysis, and decisions.

3. Country-level engagement with CSOs and public consultations are not new practices. The IMF has engaged with many interested stakeholders when formulating its policies and it has over two decades of experience in engaging with CSOs in member-countries as well as at IMF headquarters. In addition to country-focused consultations, the IMF has also been systematically incorporating external consultations with CSOs – seeking their views as it develops institutional policy advice. For example, close to 20 public consultations have been conducted since 2009.

(<http://www.imf.org/external/ns/cs.aspx?id=298>)

4. In 2003, the first guidance note for IMF's staff's outreach to CSOs was prepared, focusing primarily on issues arising from interactions with CSOs that influence the IMF's operational Work.⁵ The guidance note presented the main strategy behind building relations with CSOs and outlined the basic parameters to build positive relationships with CSOs. It offered a framework of good practices and advice mostly focused on interaction with CSO representatives. Now, after over ten years, the guidance is being revised and updated to reflect the evolving role of the Fund and its engagement with CSOs. The results of an internal survey conducted in 2010 by the IMF's Communications Department (COM) also showed that while the existing framework seemed to give staff flexibility in the way they engage with CSOs, staff called for a more systematic interaction with local

⁵ The “[Guide for Staff Relations with Civil Society Organizations](#)” was prepared by Professor Jan Aart Scholte (Centre for the Study of Globalization and Regionalization, University of Warwick, UK) and IMF Staff.

CSOs.⁶ Similarly, IMF senior officials considered that there should be a framework for consultations with CSO, especially for those countries with IMF programs.

5. The new guidelines aim to strengthen a mutually beneficial exchange between the IMF and civil society organizations. The globalized sharing of information in a hyper-connected world has raised expectations of civil society organisations and the general population for a more active participation in policy processes and for a two-way feedback into policies and issues that directly affect them. Here, it has been argued that citizen scrutiny of government policies can be a healthy means of promoting government accountability and transparency.⁷ In turn, the IMF's evolving role requires a more effective engagement strategy that is more open, genuinely inclusive, and timely. While explaining the Fund and its activities remains a key aspect of interactions with CSOs, it is equally important to listen and exchange views with civil society in order to better understand their concerns. Overall, systematic engagement with CSOs can help:

- (i) **improve program design and traction of IMF policy advice** by providing IMF staff with helpful insight, analysis, and knowledge of local contexts (for more tailored policies) to supplement official data and perspectives in official circles;
- (ii) contribute to **constructive public debate on policy options** that can help build mutual understanding of IMF-backed measures;
- (iii) **assess political viability and promote country ownership** and citizen oversight by engaging various stakeholders and constituencies; and
- (iv) enhance **IMF accountability and legitimacy** through a more transparent dialogue with a broader and diverse group of stakeholders.

6. On that basis, modernizing and updating the 2003 CSO guidelines aims at helping staff develop and strengthen their interactions with CSOs. The main objective is to enhance the IMF's operational and policy work, and strengthen the effectiveness of its support to member countries. This can be achieved through a transparent and more open country-level engagement and wider public policy consultations. The revised guidance note therefore aims to provide staff with the tools to further develop and maintain constructive relationships with CSOs through a mutually beneficial approach. The paper builds on the 2003 guidelines to provide general principles and best practices for IMF staff on how to prepare and undertake such activities in a meaningful and systematic way. The revised guidelines also strengthen existing processes for public consultations with CSOs on policy issues stemming from the IMF's policy agenda.

7. The paper is organized as follows: Section I prepares the background by discussing at great length the basic best practice principles of building relationships with CSOs.

⁶ The survey also showed no consistency on when and why the Fund should interact with CSOs. Some, but not all Article IV missions met with CSOs, and there was no common practice.

⁷ See "[Review of the IMF's Communication Strategy](#)", IMF 2014.

Section II helps staff prepare and conduct country-level engagement with CSOs, alongside the more traditional engagement with member governments, offering good practices for country teams in the field and at the IMF's headquarters. Section III lays the basic approach for preparing for and implementing public policy consultations with CSOs in line with the IMF's work program. To ensure that these guidelines will remain relevant, the document is intended to be updated as and when needed to reflect gained experience and evolving engagement and communication practices with external stakeholders.

I. Engagement with CSOs⁸

8. Interactions between IMF staff and CSOs are undertaken in the spirit of knowledge-sharing and improved understanding, where both sides have value to contribute to discussions. While the IMF remains fully accountable to its member governments, dialogue with and transparency toward citizens are important complements to this accountability. IMF interactions with CSOs supplement, and do not substitute for, governments own dialogue with their citizens. With this in mind, it is considered best practice for IMF staff to engage with CSOs in all member countries during program missions (Use of IMF Resources (UFR)), Article IV surveillance, some staff visits, some technical assistance missions, some Financial Sector Assessment Program (FSAP) missions, and at headquarters. Similarly, Resident Representatives (Res. Reps.), when present in member countries, should establish relationships with local CSOs to listen to their views and concerns, exchange available information, and undertake policy discussions as deemed appropriate and in consultation with IMF headquarters. The following sections outline the basic principles of engagements with CSOs, with the intention of supplementing IMF staff's sound judgement and experience.

9. General coordination of IMF relations with CSOs should, as much as possible, occur with the knowledge of the IMF's Communications Department (COM). Generally speaking, CO M coordinates and leads interactions and engagement with CSOs at the institutional level. Among other functions, COM can facilitate engagement with CSOs, provide guidance on consistency of messages and communications, and advise on best practices in engagement with CSOs. COM also identifies and updates a list of CSOs that are relevant for the work of the Fund. More specifically, contacts with CSOs concerning IMF policy would normally be handled through the relevant functional departments at the IMF, while country-specific issues, including financial and technical assistance, would be handled through the relevant area departments and Res. Reps.

⁸ While this guidance note focuses on IMF staff, its content may also be useful for Executive Directors and their staff, Management of the IMF, and the Independent Evaluation Office.

10. Staff should generally aim at making a strategic and diverse selection of CSOs with whom to engage with, in order to ensure that all relevant interests are heard.⁹

Although think tanks, research centers, and local offices of global CSOs are often preferred interlocutors, it is best practice to extend the dialogue beyond these traditional economic circles into local civil society. Staff could draw on COM's existing CSO database, as well as draw on the resources of the World Bank, which has well-developed civil society liaisons in many countries. While some local CSOs may decline engaging with IMF staff, either for logistical or principled reasons, it may be worth reiterating IMF interest in a dialogue at a later stage as a signal that the IMF's door remains open.

11. Develop relations with CSOs on an ongoing basis is encouraged, preferably beginning at the early stages of policy formulation, not just during missions. Peak occasions for IMF contacts with CSOs usually take place during country missions. Other forums can include ad hoc conferences and workshops and policy consultations (see section below on CSO consultations). The Annual and Spring Meetings are also good occasions to engage with CSOs. Generally, however, as best practice, interaction with key local and regional CSOs should be considered part of the Fund's ongoing work in the country.

12. Resident Representatives, where present, can play a significant role in cultivating and strengthening relationships with local CSOs.¹⁰ Res. Reps. can familiarize themselves with the landscape of local CSOs in order to build and refine their local knowledge.¹¹ Res. Reps. can also try to reach out to remote regions and to gain input of new voices using tools such as call-in radio shows, podcasts, Op EDs. in local newspapers, call-in TV shows, and other popular local media outlets. Regularly updating content on Res. Rep. Websites, in the local language to the extent possible, can also be used as effective ways of communicating with CSOs. Res. Reps. can also have an active presence on social media to engage and share views with individuals and groups on issues of concern to the IMF. Where possible, Res. Reps. can organize regular local CSO roundtables, including when country team missions and IMF management or Executive Directors are in the field. Often, leveraging events at the IMF's regional technical assistance centers can be good venues

⁹ Diversity in the selection of CSOs should include local and trans-national CSOs, small and big establishments, CSOs across the political spectrum, as well as opponents and supporters of IMF policy advice. Many of the non-traditional CSOs may be more averse to approaching the IMF, so teams may have to undertake proactive outreach to seek contact. Ideally, engagement with CSOs must transcend any internal divisions, such as rural-urban, ethnic, tribal, political, racial, and socio-economic groupings.

¹⁰ New Res. Reps. could consider meeting with COM before heading to duty stations. COM can provide resources that are available for outreach as well as updates on in-country CSOs. COM is also available to provide the support needed to design and help implement strategic plans to engage with local CSOs.

¹¹ A database of potential organizations that can be engaged with may be helpful in this regard. This list of CSOs should be shared with the IMF's COM for continued consideration and reflection, and to add to the centralized repository list of CSOs that is maintained by COM.

for such roundtables, thus offering broader regionally based discussions with available CSOs. Res. Reps. could also attend public events, forums and conferences that are organized by local CSOs. COM can assist by providing latest briefing lines and whenever necessary, conduct due diligence on groups that are organizing these events. To feed into the IMF's public policy consultation processes (see Section IV below), Res. Reps. can notify CSOs of current and upcoming public consultations and assist in connecting interested CSOs to these consultations.

13. Exchanges with CSOs can be on general IMF policy or country-specific concerns. First encounters between the IMF and CSOs often cover general matters such as the nature and purpose of the IMF, its organizational structure, concepts and theories of economics that inform the IMF's work, etc. Likewise, in first meetings, CSOs often share information about their organization and their own views about local and global issues affecting the situation on the ground. Many conversations also address broad questions on IMF conditionality, as well as policies such as inequality, subsidy reform, debt relief, capital account liberalization, poverty reduction strategies, availability of public data and country papers, and governance at the IMF. COM can provide staff with public statements and summary briefs on the IMF's latest positions on many of these policy issues. Country-specific concerns can include IMF advice on macroeconomic targets, adjustments of taxes and subsidies, civil service reform, and changes to labor legislations, among other topics.

14. In discussions with CSOs, staff should not divulge confidential or market sensitive information, as governed by the IMF's transparency policy, and should explain to their CSO counterparts that they are not in a position to discuss such matters. For example, staff is advised not to discuss sensitive information with CSOs regarding ongoing IMF program negotiations with a government, or detailed program elements that have not yet been agreed upon with government. Nor can they release market-sensitive information.

15. Building trust between IMF staff and CSOs takes time. Some CSO harbor considerable suspicion about the IMF's work in their country or region and may blame the institution for many ills. At the same time, some IMF staff have limited confidence in some CSOs and in the relevance and substance of their contributions to IMF policy making. Staff should be ready to listen to criticism, while at the same time explaining IMF policies and views. It is usually better to focus discussions on finding and consolidating common ground, rather than emphasizing dissenting views. In circumstances where mutual trust is especially low and opinions are deeply divided, IMF meetings with CSOs might be more constructive if held in the presence of an outside facilitator that is respected by all sides.

16. Both IMF staff and CSOs can have high expectations from their exchanges with each other. CSOs may hold unrealistic expectations about the extent and speed to which

the IMF can solve problems. They may have unrealistic expectations regarding the degree that contacts with IMF staff will influence policy making at the local level or at the IMF itself. It is important that staff discuss with CSOs the depth and complexity of many economic issues, as well as the complexities of decision making at the institution. At the same time, IMF staff may have unrealistic expectations regarding the degree to which engagement with CSOs provide immediately applicable input to IMF policy advice. IMF staff should always keep in mind that many of the substantive gains from engagement with CSOs will come incrementally over the long term and some level of criticism from civil society is a healthy form of public debate.

II. Country-Level, Regional, and Global Engagement with CSOs

A. Country Missions and Staff Visits

17. **It is fruitful to develop relations with CSOs on an ongoing basis, between as well as during missions, at all stages of policy formulation.** This is seen important since some degree of trust and understanding needs to be developed before more substantive engagements are planned.

Pre-Mission

18. **It is important to consult CSOs in the earlier phases of policy formulations, for programs and Article IVs** – as many CSOs can respond negatively if they feel that they are being asked to rubberstamp a fait accompli. The following good practices may be of help to country teams, missions chiefs, and resident representatives:

- Staff may wish to confer with previous country teams and resident representatives (current or past) to discuss previous and existing engagements with CSOs.
- The resident representative, where present, can usefully consult with local and global CSOs ahead of a mission and, as appropriate, incorporate their views into the missions' preparation (policy thinking and mission briefs). Such an exercise can help assess the viability of IMF advice and keep the IMF's finger on the pulse on current issues.
- When planning for missions, arrangements to meet with CSOs should, as much as possible, be incorporated into mission schedules that are eventually shared with the authorities and thereafter with the concerned CSOs, prior to mission travel.
- It would be helpful if staff can share with the CSOs previously published Article IV reports and any other IMF documentation deemed pertinent in advance of

meeting them. Where available, sharing these documents in local languages would be most helpful.

On Mission

19. **Staff should always handle interactions with CSOs in ways that do not alienate national authorities.** As a good principle, while on mission, staff should always inform the authorities that they are meeting with CSOs. The same applies to Res. Reps. IMF discussions with CSOs should not create additional difficulties for the government, nor should they substitute for the government's own responsibilities for engagement with civil society. Staff should not broach issues or make remarks that could put the government in an awkward position. Moreover, staff should not use their relations with CSOs to put direct or indirect pressure on governments.

20. **Increasingly, governments understand and accept that the IMF needs to have relations with CSOs and some governments positively encourage such contacts.** If a government raises objections to IMF relations with certain or all CSOs, staff should explain the rational for such contacts (as noted in the first section of this guidance note). If the difference of views persists, staff should refrain from contacting the CSO(s) and refer the disagreement to headquarters (area department and COM) for possible follow-up with the government concerned as deemed appropriate.

21. **Following good practices in engagement with CSOs, locally and globally, can help enhance the mutual benefits of engagement.** IMF staff will unlikely be able to meet all CSOs that have an interest in IMF activities, nor can they respond to every request from CSOs for meetings or for information and engagement. While Res. Reps. are likely to undertake the lion's share of relations with local CSOs, direct contact between the mission chief and key local and global CSOs is also very important, in order to enhance trust and understanding. The following good practices for running effective meetings and contacts with CSOs may be of help to country teams, missions chiefs, and Res. Reps., many may be common sense or common courtesy, but it is helpful to bear them in mind:

- Reply promptly to requests for information or meetings from CSO, consulting with COM as appropriate. Maintain an inclusive approach: only deny a CSO access with good reason (for example, if an organization has malicious intent or presents a seriously distorted account of itself).
- As noted above, when engaging with CSOs, the approach should be as diverse as possible, including NGOs, trade unions, research centers, think-tanks, youth leaders, women's associations, local economic associations etc. At times, it may be more appropriate to meet representatives of a number of CSOs together – group

meetings can be effective in creating a broader conversation and exchanges of opposing views between CSOs. At other times, in-depth one-on-one meetings may be more appropriate, especially when more discrete in-depth discussions of specific concerns may require smaller meetings.

- Be well-prepared and help prepare the CSO. Review information about CSOs and request relevant materials that may be prepared by CSOs prior to interactions with them. Similarly, distribute relevant published IMF documentation to CSOs in advance of the interaction, where possible in local language and be prepared to explain the functions of the IMF if needed.
- Agree on a fairly precise agenda in advance of a meeting, to encourage a focused discussion on specific questions and issues both sides may wish to raise. Set the ground rules for engagement (off- or on-the-record, Chatham House rules, whether a summary will be circulated, etc.). Allow CSOs to raise their issues of concern, even when some matters may not be priorities or may not seem directly relevant for the mission or the IMF.
- On substance, staff should judge the extent of details that they can share on their views of the domestic economic situation and the mission's policy advice to the government. Depending on context, it is generally advisable to provide an overview of the mission's main objectives in the country, including the main focus of a program, if present. As appropriate, staff can also share the views of the government, especially if already published in a previous staff report. When IMF staff are uncertain about disclosing information to CSOs, they can refer to the IMF's transparency policy for guidance on treatment of confidential and market-sensitive information. As appropriate, staff should also aim to set the discussions on the country's economic issues in a regional and global context, including the IMF's broader policy issues and positions.
- Substantive time should be devoted to listening to views and concerns of civil society on the local economy and other related issues. Ensure ample time and opportunities for comments and questions from CSOs in attendance. Discuss trade-offs between policy alternatives, and explore negative as well as positive consequences of various approaches. Avoid one-way discussions and presentations, take the initiative to ask questions to CSOs about their views – discussions with CSOs are an occasion for staff to listen and learn, as well as to speak, inform and explain. Allow for diverse opinions to come to fore (men, women, minorities, critics, as well as supporters).

- Address CSOs in plain language, avoiding technical terms, institutional acronyms, and IMF terminology. Where and when possible, provide direct translation during the meetings.
- After the meeting, make a short note on the discussions, recording who was present, what was discussed, what complaints or proposals were heard, and general impressions of the meeting. It is generally advisable to share with the CSOs as staff see fit, and with relevant IMF departments as input for future work.
- In addition, to feed into public consultations with CSOs on the IMF's policy agenda (see Section IV below), staff are encouraged to inform CSOs of any current and upcoming public consultations and assist in connecting interested CSOs to the consultation process.

Post Mission

22. Post-mission follow-up is considered essential to fostering increased traction of CSOs and meeting the objective of a two-way approach to communications at the IMF.

This can be achieved through a number of ways, including briefly summarizing the outcome of meetings with CSOs in the mission's Back to Office (BTO) report, initiating post-mission discussions with area department management to update them on views of CSOs, and including references in the staff report to these views as appropriate. When relevant, staff can also indicate reasons why meetings were not held with CSOs. If the meetings with CSOs were on-the-record, COM can also help staff update published country pages or relevant IMF CSO websites and newsletters on recent discussions with CSOs.

23. Resident representatives can play an important role in fostering more productive and lasting exchanges with CSOs. They can summarize meetings in their periodic reports, and where appropriate, consider a follow-up note to CSOs, acknowledging the main points that they have made and agreements reached during the meeting. This can also take the form of a blog, where CSOs could provide comments on-line. If relevant, resident representatives can also inform CSOs of any steps that have been taken or are intended in response to their concerns, or invite their further comment.

B. Global and Regional Engagement

24. The IMF engages constructively with CSOs during the Annual and Spring Meetings in a number of ways. The Annual and Spring Meetings provide occasions for consultative meetings between CSOs, staff and Executive Directors. Approximately 400 to 700 CSOs attend these meetings. However, the majority of CSOs attending the meetings are often from North America and Europe (northern CSOs), with only a few from emerging

markets and the developing world (southern CSOs). To help increase diversity among CSOs attending and to broaden the range of voices heard at the meetings, the Fund initiated in 2003 a Fellowship Program for CSOs at the Annual and Spring Meetings, jointly held with the World Bank.¹² This program sponsors about 20 - 40 CSO fellows to participate in the Meetings, mainly from developing countries and emerging market economies.¹³ The program also provides an opportunity for the sponsored fellows to engage with IMF staff on country, regional, and global issues, as well as to network with CSOs from other countries. Over the past eight years, more than 300 fellows from 90 countries have participated in the IMF Spring and Annual Meetings. The IMF and the World Bank also established the Civil Society Policy Forum, which usually take place the week before the spring and annual meetings. The policy forum is a platform for CSOs from around the world to organize sessions on issues of their interest that are related to the IMF and World Bank's work streams. The forum is also a good avenue for the IMF to exchange views with CSOs on topics of mutual interest, as well as openly discuss with CSOs an IMF policy issue as part of its public consultations process (see below).

25. The IMF puts together a series of high level sessions during the spring and annual meetings that involves participation from a broad group of CSOs, including NGOs, think tanks, research centers, and academics. The Fund is paying closer attention to diversity in the lineup of panelists for these sessions, including gradually increasing representation from different sectors of the society, including CSOs as appropriate. Regular dialogue and interactions with youth has also become an important part of IMF's engagement with the broader CSO community.

26. IMF Management and staff occasionally participate in seminars, conferences, and meetings organized by CSOs. Think tanks, research centers, and NGOs regularly request Fund participation in their events, offering a non-traditional platform for additional engagement and exchange of views with civil society organizations. Global CSOs can also at times facilitate contact between IMF staff and regional/local representatives.

¹² The program includes a full day of capacity building on the Fund's work; a meeting with IMF Executive Directors; bilateral meetings with Fund staff; and (at the Annual Meetings) a CSO Town Hall with the IMF Managing Director and the President of the World Bank.

¹³ The IMF's Communications Department coordinates with the IMF's area departments and Resident Representatives to select the fellows. Nominations are made three months in advance of the spring and annual meetings, and priority countries and areas of interest are assessed. COM ensures diversity in terms of gender, educational background, and regional representation.

III. Consultations for Policy and Strategy papers

27. **The IMF's Work Program provides an excellent opportunity to consider and plan policy areas where IMF staff can seek the views of CSOs to bring in a more diverse view to the IMF's policy thinking.** IMF staff have increasingly briefed and consulted with civil society groups on policy issues that are developed at the IMF. This has supplemented IMF staff engagement with member country governments. The idea behind consulting CSOs on thematic policy issues is to sound out the IMF's external stakeholders for their views on proposed policy changes at the IMF and to discuss the strategic thinking behind these changes. Similar to the objectives of engaging with CSOs at the country level, public consultations on policy issues also aim to enhance the IMF's effectiveness by incorporating views early on.

28. **Public consultations are an open call for comments on relevant IMF policies and/or strategies.** Functional departments, in coordination with COM, can work together to examine the Work Program and identify topics of policy relevance to CSOs. It may also be appropriate for COM to approach functional department with some ideas for a public consultation. COM usually designs an online platform devoted to receiving input from interested stakeholders, including NGOs, academia, think tanks, labor, faith based organizations, and research centers, among others. Since policy documents cannot be publicly shared with CSOs prior to discussion by the IMF Executive Board, IMF staff should prepare outlines and brief notes that could serve as the basis for consultations with CSOs – seeking comments on concepts and policy principles, before the formulation of policy papers for discussion by the Board (see additional details below).

29. **Over the past decade a number of public consultations on key policy areas have taken place.** Generally, papers that call for a major change in IMF policy should be subject to a consultation process, while papers that are routine updates of IMF policies may not. More specifically, in the last five years, the Fund has conducted successful public consultations (web-based) and received input from CSOs on key issues such as Financial Sector Taxation, LIC Facilities Review, Natural Resources, IMF Mandate, Triennial Surveillance Review, Fiscal Transparency, among others. COM usually leads the process in coordination with relevant Fund departments.

30. **In some cases, targeted and closed consultations may be initially more appropriate vehicles to seek input from CSOs on sensitive or complex policy issues.** A selected number of CSOs could be invited to sound out the IMF's policy thinking on a complex or sensitive issue (for example, an issue that requires consensus building with the majority of the Fund's membership). The IMF can seek the views of a small number of CSOs through off-the-record meetings or conference calls, as initial input to the policy thinking. As the policy is more fully

formulated and informally discussed by the IMF Executive Directors, it may be appropriate to open up the consultation to a wider set of CSOs (see Section B below for more details).

	Public Consultation	Targeted Consultation
Issues	IMF policy papers that require Board approval are subject to public consultations.	Policy issues that are sensitive or whose preparation process is complex
Modalities	Open call to civil society organizations and other interested stakeholders, online platform is created to receive comments. On the record conference calls supplement the online engagement.	Some CSOs are identified and invited to engage with the Fund (meetings or conference call). Interactions are off-the-record. No online platform is created
Target	Worldwide civil society organizations	Pre-identified CSOs
Duration	Minimum of six weeks, up to three months	Unidentified
Disclosure	Comments received are posted online at the end of the consultation. A summary of the feedback received is incorporated in the final paper submitted to the Board.	IMF staff incorporates CSO input (summary) in the policy paper submitted to the Board. Comments are disclosed when paper is published.

A. Conducting Public Consultations

31. **As is currently practiced, once a policy topic is chosen to benefit from input from a wide range of CSOs, a public consultation process should begin as soon as the functional department has a roadmap for the Board paper.** The IMF public consultation process is an open call for feedback from CSOs, and interested stakeholders, around the world. A wide and thorough public consultation may require IMF staff to aim for multiple venues and modes of interaction, and to seek input from a wide range of stakeholders throughout the process of preparing the Board paper. The following good practices may be of help for departments preparing for a public consultation with CSOs:

- Departments are encouraged to allocate adequate time for consultation with CSOs during the planning process for a Board document. Ideally, planning for a consultation process should start **about six months before the scheduled Board Discussion of the policy paper**. The process can start as early as a **concept note** on the topic is available, or later, when a **mid-point note** is prepared for management.
- Departments should first discuss the elements of the policy paper that may be of importance for stakeholders and may raise questions or issues.
- The functional department would then put together a **list of questions** that would help guide the exchange with CSOs. A **preamble to the topic** of the consultation

should be drafted to explain the policy relevance of the issues under consideration. A **survey or questionnaire** may also be a useful easy-to-use way to seek input from CSOs.

- COM would then design an online platform for CSOs to access material related to policy papers as described above. **COM will publicize the public consultation process** using press releases as appropriate, social media platforms, and newsletters, to reach as wide a group of CSOs as possible. IMF staff can also help reach CSOs through their mission teams and Resident Representatives (see Section I above). For example, mission teams and Res. Reps. can, in their scheduled meetings with local CSOs, note the topic of an ongoing or forthcoming consultation and encourage CSOs to provide comments via the online platform.
- CSOs can **submit their comments via the online platform** and COM will be responsible for monitoring all submissions. If possible, COM will also look into other technical avenues for CSOs to submit input.
- The consultation process should run for a minimum of **six weeks to eight weeks** and can be shorter or longer, if warranted.
- At about three weeks into the public consultation window (or sooner if the window is shorter), COM could organize a **teleconference between the functional department and interested CSOs**. The objective is for departments to have the opportunity to flesh out ideas and views from the comments already received. It is also an opportunity for CSOs to have a two-way discussion on the topics, to allow them to further understand the issues and better reflect on their comments they want to submit.
- COM will send the transcript of the conference call to the functional department.
- If the consultation process falls during the spring or annual Meetings, it may also be appropriate to have a seminar session during the Civil Society Policy Forum (see Section II.B above). Such a session would be another good forum for CSOs to exchange their views with IMF staff and with other CSOs.
- Depending on the policy issue that is under consideration at the IMF, functional departments may also want to embark on a road-show outside DC to help further the understanding of CSOs and other key stakeholders of the issues at hand and receive their direct feedback. For example, prior to the 2009 reform of the LIC architecture, SPR went on a road-show in Europe to discuss the elements of IMF support to LICs with external donors. COM can provide logistical support as appropriate.

- At the end of the consultation period, COM compiles all submitted comments and sends them to the functional department for review. In parallel, all comments received are also published on the online platform created for the consultation.
- Ideally, functional departments should then try to incorporate CSO views in the policy making process. Staff may want to attribute any changes in policy to input from CSOs. Any follow up with CSOs on certain topics can be arranged through COM.
- Staff, with support from COM, can provide feedback to CSOs on what the IMF has gathered and learnt from the public consultation process and what the IMF's main positions on the issues raised.
- The final version of the paper should acknowledge the fact that a public consultation took place. In addition, a box summarizing the main views of CSOs should be included in the report (either in the main text or in an annex). In addition, an annex that includes a list of all contributing CSOs should be added to the report.
- Once the paper is published on the IMF's internet, COM will post the paper on the consultation webpage, alongside all the comments received from CSOs. COM will also send the paper via email to all CSOs in COM's database.

B. Conducting Targeted Consultations

32. **Some policy areas considered at the IMF may be more complex or more sensitive than others, and may thus require a more gradual approach to consultation with external stakeholders.** Some policy areas need a longer consultation process inside the IMF, before staff are able to consult with CSOs. Other topics may only be of interest to a select group of CSOs that are closely following the issue under consideration. Under these circumstances, it may be more efficient to initiate a more targeted consultation with a smaller, select group of CSOs. If appropriate, and time permitting, a targeted consultation can be followed by a public consultation process.

33. **The process is similar to that described above for public consultation, and the best practices set above remain applicable.** However, instead of reaching out to a large number of CSOs, IMF staff would identify a selected number of CSOs to seek their views and input on the policy issue. In addition, instead of publicizing the consultation on a website, IMF staff can invite the selected CSOs for a meeting at the IMF, a teleconference call, or other venues. These meetings will often be on confidential basis and off-the-record. COM will provide a transcript to all parties where and when possible. Just as with the public consultations, IMF staff are encouraged to incorporate CSO views into the policy paper and add a box with the main issues raised and discussed with CSOs.

Appendix I: Methodology and Background

As an integral part of the process of revising the CSO guidelines, interviews with staff and CSOs were conducted alongside a survey with CSOs. An external consultant was hired by the Communication Department to assist in the process. Dr. Bessma Momani, Senior Fellow at the Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), interviewed a number of IMF staff and CSOs and conducted an online survey on CSO engagement with the IMF. The survey was sent out to about 1,500 CSOs, and about 152 responded – a response rate of about 10 percent.

The following are the main results of the interviews and survey, as conducted and assessed by Ms. Momani.

Results of the interviews with Staff/CSOs¹⁴

On March 18 and 19 2013, Ms. Momani met with a number of IMF staff from various departments to enquire about their perceptions of how and why the IMF engages with civil society organizations. From these meetings it was found that most IMF staff appreciated the purpose and rationale of engaging with CSOs. However, many did not know that the 2003 policy on IMF staff engagement existed, and therefore have not read it.

When asked about their thoughts regarding engagement with CSOs, IMF staff stated that CSO engagement:

1. Improves loan design and implementation.
2. Provides political, cultural, social and local context.
3. Pre-identifies potential loopholes in conditionality and required pace of reforms.
4. Improves country ownership of country agreements.
5. Humanizes the IMF as an organization and dispels misinformation about the Fund.
6. Speaks to a plurality of stakeholders - that is, wider than governments thanks to information communication technologies and increased political liberalization- and is therefore necessary to get the IMF's perspective out there.
7. Has pushed Fund staff to explain or consider distributional issues of IMF loan programmes.
8. Improves their own reports to headquarters.

It was also found that a consistent approach for CSO engagement across departments was lacking; for example, some departments with a longer history of loan programs, such as the African Department, adopted the practice of CSO engagement earlier than others that did not have similar programs but which also would have benefited from the input of CSOs. Indeed, most IMF staff members who met with Dr. Momani expressed their desire for a clearer protocol on to how

¹⁴ The section was provided by Ms. Momani without any editorial or other changes by the IMF.

to engage with CSOs, with a number of staff noting that they wanted incentives for engagement to be better institutionalized within the Fund. Moreover, a number of staff noted that outlining logistics for engagement with CSOs is a helpful resource to provide staff before they leave for missions/country visits, as is the provision of clear backgrounds of individual CSOs.

Finally, although IMF staff stated that they would like to share more information with CSOs on discussions with country officials, they are prevented from doing so by Fund mandates and the Executive Board. There is some unease about how much information staff can and cannot share, even though the media often reports a great deal of information that the Fund staff believes it cannot. Staff would therefore like more support from management when misinformation is leaked to media.

Results of the CSO Survey¹⁵

In addition to IMF staff perspectives, an online survey questionnaire was initially sent to approximately 1500 CSO contacts from a database provided by Communications staff. The IMF also provided a number of public notices on its website that invited CSOs to comment. A number of CSOs distributed the link to the survey on their networks. A total of 152 surveys were completed throughout July and August. The survey questionnaire was posted on-line through purchasing an exclusive domain from Qualtrics¹⁶, an international firm that specializes in on-line research instruments. Qualtrics provides the Internet domain, ensures its security, and provides statistics about the number of times the instrument was accessed.

The online survey questionnaire was comprised of 20 questions that included basic identifying questions and a number of closed-ended questions that elicited specific feedback. Most of the substantive questions took the form of a Likert scale, while the rest consisted of either a “yes” or “no” choice, or required the respondent to make a selection from a predetermined list. Survey results are presented in Appendix A.

Most CSOs identify as NGOs (66%) and operate either in one country (44%) or internationally (46%). Individuals surveyed had worked for more than ten years in their CSO (40%) and had primarily engaged with the IMF in the past five years (60%). Overall, most CSOs believed the IMF facilitates access to information most or some of the time, and a majority of respondents (63%) believed the IMF had become more open and transparent. CSOs interviewed also noted that they had an overall positive or neutral experience with the IMF, although a minority reported that they had a negative view of the IMF (18%).

Owing to enhanced transparency, survey respondents noted that significant strides have been made in IMF staff openness to listen and discuss ideas with CSOs. Survey respondents also indicated that previous engagement with CSOs has helped to improve communications among

¹⁵ The section was provided by Ms. Momani without any editorial or other changes by the IMF.

¹⁶ The Qualtrics general website can be accessed at: <http://www.qualtrics.com/>

CSOs and to explain IMF activities and workings, and has slightly helped to provide support on improving CSO understanding of IMF concepts and policies.

CSOs, however, have mixed responses as to whether the IMF takes local community's viewpoint into consideration when shaping IMF decisions. Indeed, many CSOs (59%) felt that IMF staff did not follow up on engagements, which CSOs preferred to conduct via personal meetings, email, or using a combination of tools. In terms of IMF input, CSOs utilize a variety of IMF publications in their work, with a noticeable lower response rate for working papers, IMF pamphlets, and the regional economic outlook.

a) *Interviews with CSOs*

CSOs were invited to converse at the IMF Spring meeting in 2013 to discuss ways of revising the guidelines. A number of interviews were also conducted with CSOs who completed the above survey and requested a follow-up conversation in August 2013.

Notably, many CSOs noted that the current webpage, 'IMF and Civil Society', does not give them the opportunity to converse with the IMF. Rather, it only provides a running news feeder and many CSOs stated their frustration of not knowing who to contact with their questions regarding engagement and consultation (contact detail for CSOs is currently buried at bottom of webpage and provides only phone numbers, not email). CSOs also expressed some scepticism that engagement with the IMF is actually window dressing that has little impact on policy design and implementation, and stated that they are often not given enough notice to properly prepare for consultation with the IMF.

Finally, while CSOs found IMF staff to be knowledgeable about countries and generally empathetic to a country's economic situation, they found that the IMF is inclined to be less knowledgeable about a country's political and social situation. A strong feeling of low follow-up after engagement is present among many of the CSOs, who also questioned whether their engagement with the IMF has had any impact on IMF work flow.

b) *Public Consultations with CSOs*

Dr. Momani initiated a number of public consultations with CSOs. Beginning in 2013 at the spring meetings, Dr. Momani met with CSOs as part of the civil society forum. A beneficial roundtable produced a wealth of information and views on the successes and challenges of public consultation and country-level engagement. During summer 2013, a webpage inviting CSO to contribute to an online survey was initiated, the results of which were noted above. Another meeting of CSOs was arranged at the Annual Meetings in Washington, DC where Dr. Momani met with a number of CSOs who were updated on preliminary findings and who provided further input into the expectations of how to expand public consultations.