

2015 Guidelines on the IMF Staff Engagement with Civil Society Organizations

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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 represent public interest and have a role in ensuring that individuals participate directly in shaping the rules of their economic systems. 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 across all IMF member countries, while maintaining that its accountability to these countries. 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, especially over time, enhance and help translate IMF policy advice to member countries into successful policy.** The IMF recognizes the benefits of a transparent and wide engagement with CSOs, as a means for improving its policy advice and analysis, as well as enhancing support for reforms and deepening country ownership.³ More generally, engagement with external stakeholders, including interactions with CSOs, is an integral part of IMF country and policy work. Dialogue with civil society groups is only one part of the IMF's public outreach strategy. Other elements of similar importance include IMF contacts with parliamentarians, politicians, mass media, and citizens at large. 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 the IMF's work, and to

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. Tilla 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 (IMF) for her guidance throughout the process.

² Civil Society Organizations can include nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), business forums, faith-based organizations, labor unions and professional organizations, local community groups, philanthropic and charitable organizations, gender and women's associations, local organizations of persons with disabilities, 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 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.

dispel public misconceptions regarding the IMF and its activities. At the same time, the IMF remains accountable to its member countries – while dialogue with and transparency towards citizens represent important complements to this accountability, IMF staff relations with CSOs cannot substitute for the member’s own engagement with civil society.

2. **Increasingly, governments understand and accept that the IMF needs to have relations with CSOs and some governments positively encourage such contacts.** Staff should always handle interactions with CSOs in ways that do not alienate national authorities. Staff should always inform the authorities that they plan to meet with CSOs while on mission. If a government raises objections to IMF relations with certain or all CSOs, staff could explain the rationale for such contacts (see below). If the difference of views persists, staff should refrain from contacting the CSO(s) and discuss next steps with headquarters (area department and COM).

3. **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 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 (see Appendix II). 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. In a Globescan global opinions’ survey conducted in 2014, civil society respondents noted that the IMF’s main strengths lay in research, high quality data, and ability to identify long-term economic challenges. However, they gave the IMF lowest ratings on crisis avoidance, job promotion, evenhandedness, and representation.

4. **Country-level engagement with CSOs and public policy 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 engagement, the IMF has also been systematically incorporating external consultations with CSOs into its process of drawing policies, by seeking their views as it develops institutional policy advice. For example, close to 20 public consultations centered on IMF policies have been conducted since 2009 (see Section III below).⁴

⁴ See <http://www.imf.org/external/ns/cs.aspx?id=298>.

5. **In 2003, the first guidance note for IMF 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. Thirteen years on, this guidance note is being revised and updated to reflect the evolving role of the IMF 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 CSOs.⁶ Similarly, IMF senior officials considered that there should be a framework for consultations with CSO, especially for those countries with IMF programs.

6. **The new guidelines aim to strengthen a mutually beneficial exchange between the IMF and civil society organizations in all its member countries.** 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 IMF 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 and long-term engagement with CSOs can help: (i) **improve program design and, more generally, 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 national policy measures and reforms supported by the policy recommendations; (iii) **assess political viability and promote country ownership** of policy measures and reforms, 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.

7. **The paper is organized as follows:** Section I prepares the background by discussing basic good practice principles of building relationships with CSOs. Section II helps staff prepare and conduct country-level engagement with CSOs, alongside the more

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.

⁶ The survey also showed no consistency on when and why the IMF interacts 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.

traditional engagement with member countries, 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 the staff of the IMF 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 countries, 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, with the consent of the authorities, during missions (Use of IMF Resources (UFR)), Article IV surveillance, some staff visits, technical assistance missions including Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes (ROSCs), Financial Sector Assessment Program (FSAP) missions), and at headquarters. Similarly, Resident Representatives (Res. Reps.), when present in member countries, and staff in regional IMF offices 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 that should be viewed as a supplement to IMF staff's 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).**⁹ This could help COM maintain and build its institutional repository of engagement with CSOs that could be a relevant reference to IMF staff across the institution. Generally speaking, COM coordinates and leads interactions and engagement with CSOs at the institutional level, while normally area-departments and Res. Reps directly handle contacts with CSOs at the country-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 global,

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.

⁹ All enquiries can be channeled through the following email: publicaffairs@imf.org, which is monitored on a daily basis. COM staff try to respond to all enquiries within 24 hours.

regional, and country-specific CSOs that are relevant for the work of the IMF. The list is available to all IMF staff upon request.

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.¹⁰

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. Conducting due diligence on the legitimacy of the selected CSO is important to ensure proper representation within the country and avoid interaction with politically motivated organizations. Res. Reps, IMF regional and technical assistance offices, and COM, can help staff conduct this due diligence. Staff could also draw on COM's existing CSO database, which includes contacts for global, regional, and country-level CSOs, as well as draw on the resources of the World Bank, which has well-developed civil society liaisons in many countries. Contacts with CSOs can take various forms, depending on available resources and technologies, including in-person meetings, conference calls, webinars and seminars, email, etc. 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. Developing relations with CSOs on an ongoing basis and over the long-term, is encouraged, preferably beginning at the early stages of policy formulation, during missions, and afterwards. 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 IMF's ongoing work in the country.

12. Resident Representatives and staff in regional IMF offices, where present, can play a significant role in cultivating and strengthening relationships with local CSOs, thus providing important insights that can inform HQ-based IMF staff.¹¹ Res. Reps and staff in regional IMF offices can familiarize themselves with the landscape of local

¹⁰ 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. Some 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.

¹¹ More generally, new Res. Reps., including in regional IMF offices and technical assistance centers, could consider meeting with COM before heading to duty stations. COM can provide general resources that are available for outreach, as well as more specific updates on in-country CSOs. COM is also available to provide the support needed to design and help implement strategic engagement plans.

CSOs in order to build and refine their local knowledge.¹² Res. Reps. and staff in regional IMF offices can also try to reach out to remote regions, as appropriate, 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. Where possible, Res. Reps. and staff in regional IMF offices can organize regular local CSO roundtables, including when country team missions and IMF management or Executive Directors are in the field. At times, leveraging events at the IMF's regional technical assistance centers and regional offices can be good venues for such roundtables, thus offering broader regionally-based discussions with available CSOs. Res. Reps. and staff in regional IMF offices 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 III below), Res. Reps. and staff in regional IMF offices can notify CSOs of current and upcoming public policy consultations and assist in connecting interested CSOs to these consultations.

13. Exchanging views 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 also 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. CSOs are also often interested in the impact of policy measures and reforms on the economy in the short- and long-term, including on jobs, salaries, and public service, among others. In all such communications with CSOs, staff should make clear that their exchanges express the views of IMF staff and that the IMF's ultimate position would depend on the Executive Board.¹³

¹² A database of potential organizations that can be engaged with may be helpful in this regards. This list of CSOs should be shared with COM for continued consideration and reflection, and to add to the centralized repository list of CSOs that is maintained by COM.

¹³ For further guidance on attribution of views, see the [Review of The IMF's Communication's Policy](#), IMF 2014.

14. **In discussions with CSOs, as with any other engagement with external stakeholders, staff should not divulge confidential information or non-public information, including market sensitive information, as governed by the IMF’s rules of confidentiality and other relevant IMF rules on disclosure of information.** As a general matter, any confidential information provided by a member country or other third parties may not be disclosed unless the information provider consents to disclosure and such disclosure is consistent with relevant IMF rules. In addition, with respect to any non-public information generated within the IMF, such information may not be disclosed without consulting with relevant IMF parties and in line with relevant IMF policies. For example, staff is advised not to discuss sensitive information with CSOs or information that is not yet in the public domain, regarding ongoing IMF-supported program-discussions with a government. Nor can they release market-sensitive information without relevant authorizations pursuant to general IMF policies. If pressed by CSOs to reveal sensitive or confidential information, staff should clarify that they are bound by strict IMF confidentiality rules.

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. In their engagements with CSOs, 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

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 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 solicit and exchange views with 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, resident representatives (current or past), and COM to discuss previous and existing engagements with CSOs.
- The resident representative, where present, can usefully exchange views with local and global CSOs ahead of a mission and, as appropriate, give advice on policy thinking and relay their views to headquarters as part of mission preparation (policy thinking and mission briefs). Such an exercise can help assess the viability of IMF advice in the country 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 shared with the authorities and thereafter with the concerned CSOs, prior to mission travel. The authorities may invite a representative to attend staff meetings with CSOs, or in some cases, the authorities may request that IMF staff not meet with CSOs (see below).
- 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.** Staff should always inform the authorities that they plan to meet with CSOs while on mission. 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 – that is, staff should be careful not to encourage CSOs to exert 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 could explain the rationale 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. and staff in regional IMF offices 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, mission chiefs, Res. Reps., and staff in regional IMF offices. 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).
- **Cast a wide and diverse net of engagement.** When possible, meet with NGOs, trade unions, research centers, think-tanks, youth leaders, women's associations, organizations for people with disabilities, local economic associations etc, giving due consideration to priorities and relevance to country and policy issues. 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 and clarify 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, while adhering to the IMF's confidentiality rules and other relevant IMF rules on disclosure of information. 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, if already published in a previous staff report or otherwise, if not publically available, with the government’s consent. When IMF staff are uncertain about disclosing information to CSOs, they can refer to the IMF’s confidentiality rules and other relevant IMF rules on disclosure of information, such as the [Transparency Policy](#) for guidance. Staff may also consult with the Legal Department and SPR for further guidance.

- As appropriate, staff can also **set the discussions in a regional and global context**, including the IMF’s broader policy issues and positions (e.g. referencing the World Economic Outlook (WEO) or a Regional Economic Outlook (REO)).
- **Devote substantive time 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.** Help CSOs understand the rationale behind IMF policy prescriptions and the impact of policy measures and reforms on the economy in the short- and long-term, including on jobs, salaries, and public service, among others. Where and when possible, provide direct translation in the local language, 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.
- To feed into public consultations with CSOs on the IMF’s policy agenda (see Section III 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 and long-term engagement

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. Continuous general outreach with civil society contacts and exchanging information over the long-term is an essential part of building meaningful relations. Here, Res. Reps. can play an important role in fostering more productive and lasting exchanges with CSOs. They can meet with them on a more regular basis (off-mission cycles). When possible, it is good practice to 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. 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. They can also share with them research and reports published by the IMF, and be open to receive research conducted by civil society, listen, and exchange views on issues of interest.

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, Management, 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, with only a few from emerging markets and the developing world. To help increase diversity among CSOs attending and to broaden the range of voices heard at the meetings, the IMF initiated in 2003 a Fellowship Program for CSOs at the Annual and Spring Meetings, jointly held with the World Bank.¹⁴ This program sponsors about 20 - 40 CSO fellows to participate in the Meetings, mainly from developing countries and emerging market economies.¹⁵ 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 CSO representatives from other countries. Over the past eight years, more than 300 fellows from 90 countries have

¹⁴ The program includes a full day of capacity building on the IMF's work; a meeting with IMF Executive Directors; bilateral meetings with IMF staff; and (at the Annual Meetings) a CSO Town Hall with the IMF Managing Director and the President of the World Bank.

¹⁵ 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.

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 seminars during the Spring and Annual Meetings that involves participation from a broad group of CSOs, including NGOs, think tanks, research centers, and academics.** The IMF 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 boarder CSO community.

26. **IMF Management and staff occasionally participate in public seminars, conferences, and meetings organized by CSOs.** Think tanks, research centers, and NGOs regularly request IMF participation in their events, offering a non-traditional platform for additional engagement and exchange of views with civil society organizations. Before participating in such events with CSOs, staff should consult with COM.

III. CONSULTATIONS FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY PAPERS

27. **The IMF's [Global Policy Agenda](#) and its Executive Board's [Work Program](#) provide 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 authorities. 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, consultations on policy issues also aim to enhance the IMF's effectiveness by incorporating a broader set of views early on in the process.

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 [Global Policy Agenda](#) and the [Work Program](#) to identify topics of policy relevance to CSOs. COM may also approach functional department with ideas for a public consultation on a policy issue. At the same time, CSOs can also be encouraged to examine the IMF's Global Policy Agenda and the Work Program, which is regularly available on the IMF's website, to enable them to anticipate upcoming policy issues at the IMF and facilitate their engagement with IMF staff on issues of interest to them. For all public

policy consultations, COM usually designs an online platform devoted to receiving input from interested stakeholder. Since policy documents cannot be shared with CSOs prior to discussion by the IMF Executive Board, IMF staff could 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 called for a major change in IMF policy have been considered for a consultation process, while papers that are routine updates of IMF policies were not. For example, in the last five years, the IMF has conducted successful public consultations (web-based) and received input from CSOs on key issues such as Financial Sector Taxation, Low-income Countries' Facilities Review, Natural Resources, IMF Mandate, Triennial Surveillance Review, Fiscal Transparency, among others.¹⁶ COM usually leads the process in coordination with relevant IMF departments.

30. **In some cases, targeted and closed consultations may initially be 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 IMF'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 below for more details).

¹⁶ See <http://www.imf.org/external/ns/cs.aspx?id=298>.

	Public Consultation	Targeted Consultation
Policy issue	Some of the policy issues that are in the IMF's Global Policy Agenda and the IMF's Work Program would be good candidates for public consultations.	Policy issues that need consensus building at the membership level, or that have a complex preparation process.
Modalities	Open call to civil society organizations and other interested stakeholder through an online platform. After receiving comments, could also do a conference call (on-the-record) to supplement online engagement.	A small select group of civil society representatives can be identified and invited to engage with the IMF on the topic (in-person meeting or a conference call). Interactions can be off-the-record. No online platform is created.
Target audience	Worldwide civil society organizations.	Pre-identified group of CSOs.
Duration	Six to eight weeks.	Depending on timeline and topic.
Disclosure	Comments received from civil society will be posted online at the end of the consultation period. Ideally, the Board paper can refer to the feedback received from CSOs.	Comments and feedback received provide input to the policy thinking at the IMF.

A. Conducting Public Policy 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 if available, or later, when a **mid-point note** is prepared for management.
- Departments would first **internally 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, Res. Reps., and staff in regional IMF offices 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, including but not limited webinars, phone conferences, and email.
- The consultation process should run for a minimum of **six weeks to eight weeks**, but 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 IMF's low-income country (LICs) architecture, IMF staff went on a road-show to discuss the elements of IMF support to LICs with external stakeholders. 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 would then try to **incorporate CSO views in the policy making process**. Staff may want to attribute any changes in policy to input from CSOs.
- 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. Any follow up with CSOs on certain topics can be arranged through COM.
- It is good practice that the final version of the paper **acknowledges the fact that a public consultation took place**. In addition, a box summarizing the main views of CSOs could 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 could 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, or some consensus building among the IMF's membership, 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.

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: Staff and CSO Surveys

1. 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 (COM) to assist in the process. Ms. 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.

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

Results of the interviews with Staff/CSOs¹⁷

3. 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.

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

- Improves loan design and implementation.
- Provides political, cultural, social and local context.
- Pre-identifies potential loopholes in conditionality and required pace of reforms.
- Improves country ownership of country agreements.
- Humanizes the IMF as an organization and dispels misinformation about the Fund.
- 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.
- Has pushed Fund staff to explain or consider distributional issues of IMF loan programmes.
- Improves their own reports to headquarters.

5. 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 Ms. Momani expressed

¹⁷ The section was provided by Ms. Momani without any editorial or other changes by the IMF.

their desire for a clearer protocol on to how 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.

6. 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 Survey¹⁸

7. In addition to IMF staff perspectives, an online survey questionnaire was initially sent to approximately 1500 CSO contacts from a database provided by COM 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 Qualtrics,¹⁹ 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.

8. 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 II.

9. Most CSOs identify as NGOs (66 percent) and operate either in one country (44 percent) or internationally (46 percent). Individuals surveyed had worked for more than ten years in their CSO (40 percent) and had primarily engaged with the IMF in the past five years (60 percent). Overall, most CSOs believed the IMF facilitates access to information most or some of the time, and a majority of respondents (63 percent) 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 percent).

10. 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

¹⁸ The section was provided by Ms. Momani without any editorial or other changes by the IMF.

¹⁹ The Qualtrics general website can be accessed at: <http://www.qualtrics.com/>

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

11. 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

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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

15. Ms. Momani initiated a number of public consultations with CSOs. Beginning in 2013 at the spring meetings, Ms. 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 Ms. 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.

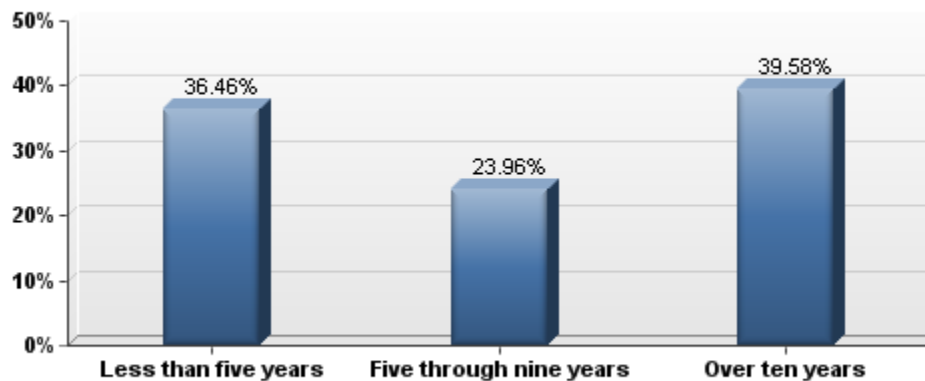
Appendix II: CSO Responses to the Survey on IMF's Engagement with CSOs

1. What is the type of CSO you work for?

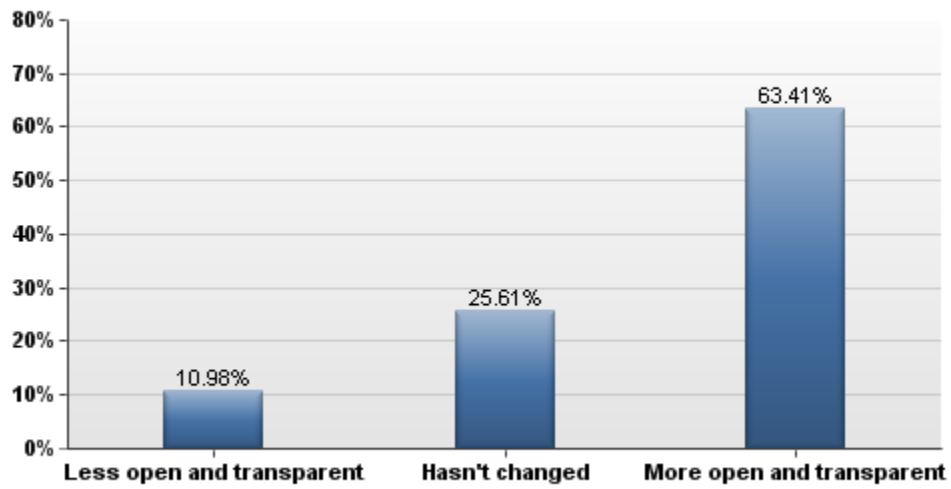
#	Answer	Response	%
1	Faith-based	1	1%
2	Labour	2	2%
3	Community group	4	4%
4	Non-governmental organization	73	66%
5	Think tank	11	10%
6	Philanthropy	2	2%
7	Business group	4	4%
8	Academia	8	7%
9	Other	5	5%
	Total	110	100%

2. How long have you worked for your existing CSO?

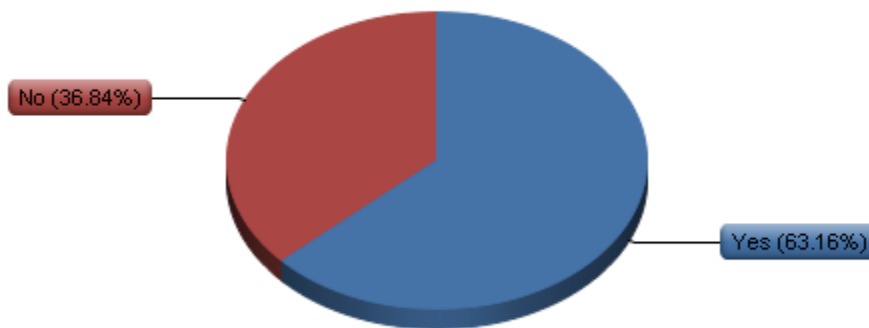
#	Answer	Response	%
1	Less than five years	35	36%
3	Five through nine years	23	24%
4	Over ten years	38	40%
	Total	96	100%



3. In the last five years, the IMF has become:

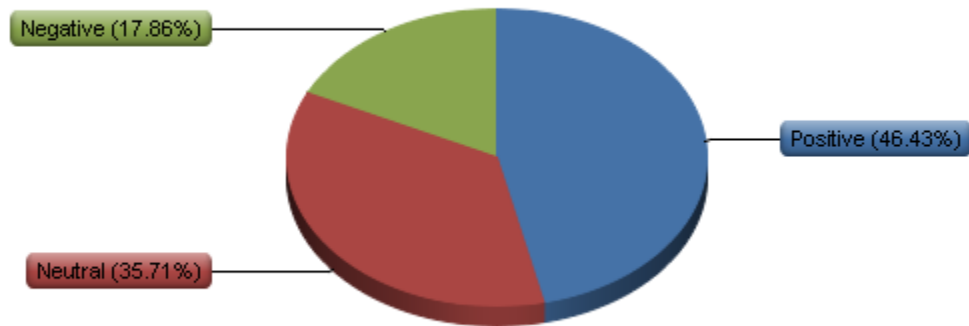


4. Has your CSO engaged with IMF staff in the last five years?

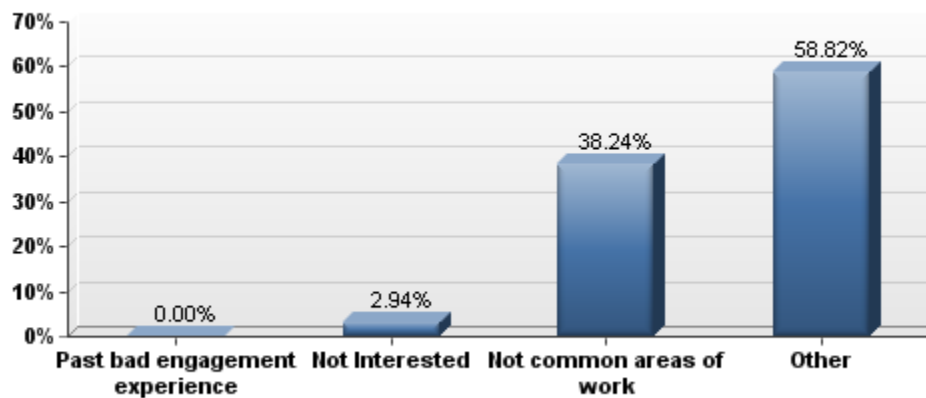


5. If yes, how do you rate your overall experience with the IMF?

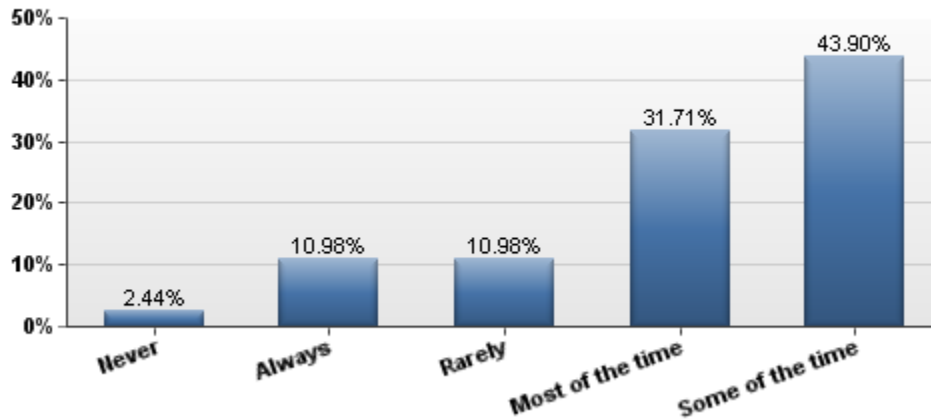
#	Answer	Response	%
1	Positive	26	46%
2	Neutral	20	36%
3	Negative	10	18%
	Total	56	100%



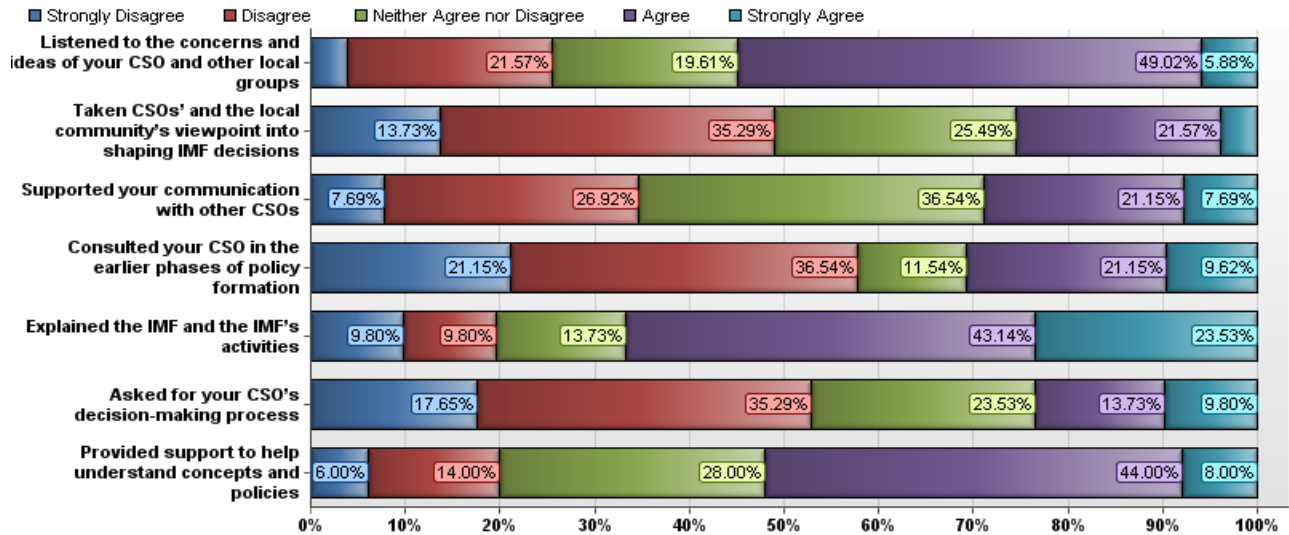
6. If not, why haven't you engaged with the IMF?



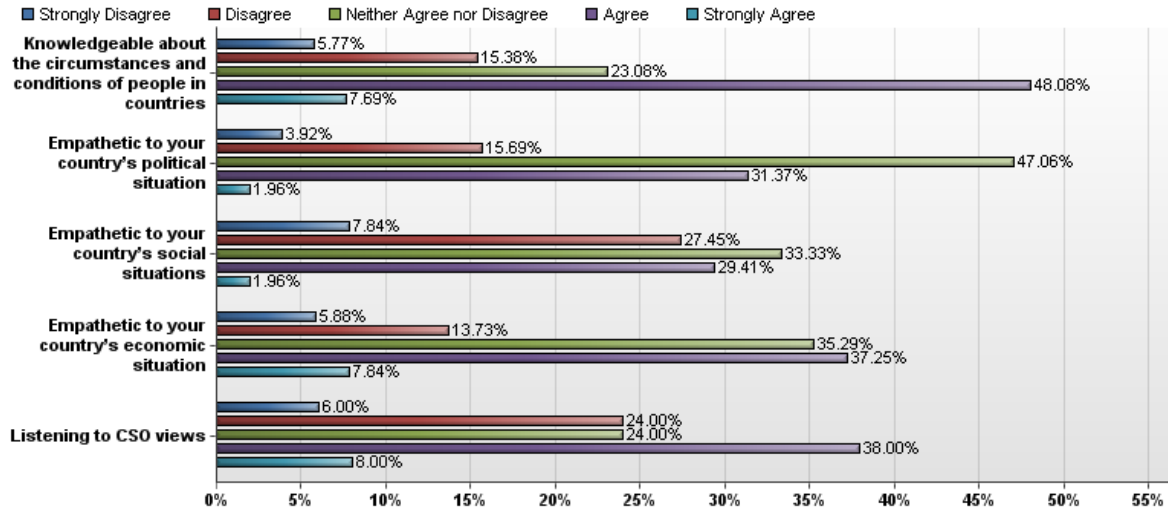
7. The IMF facilitates access to information to CSOs:



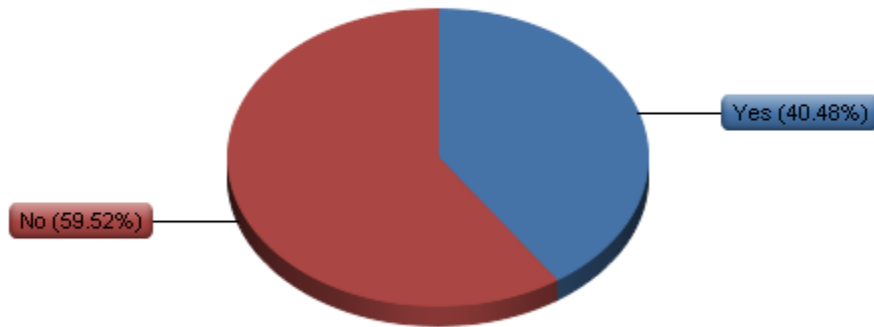
8. Do you believe that IMF staff has:

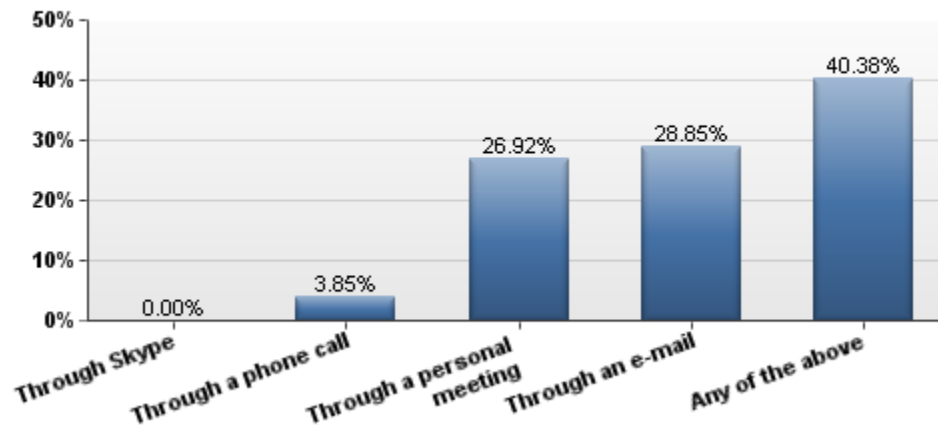
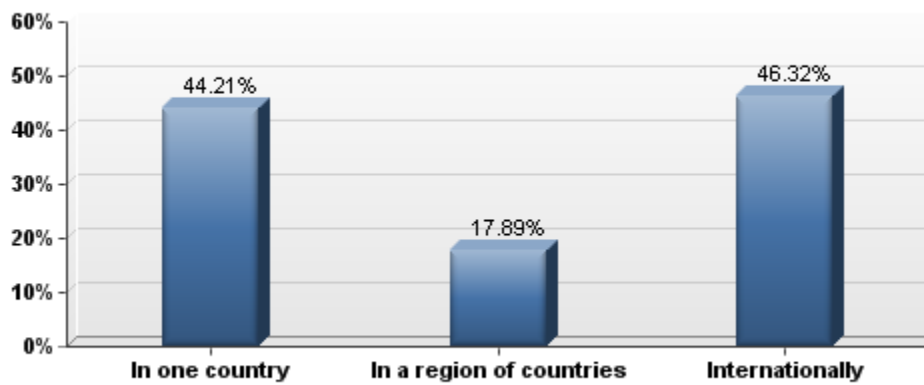


9. Did you find IMF staff to be:



10. Did IMF staff provide follow-up to your engagements?



11. What do you consider to be the best method for follow-up?**12. Does the work of your CSO operate and/or have projects:**

13. The IMF is listening to CSOs' views and opinions:



14. Do you read any of the following IMF publications in your work?

