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Implementation Plan in Response to the Board-Endorsed Recommendations for the IEO Report “Behind the Scenes with Data at the IMF



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IMPLEMENTATION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE BOARD-ENDORSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IEO EVALUATION REPORT—BEHIND THE SCENES WITH DATA AT THE IMF

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IMPLEMENTATION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE BOARD-ENDORSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IEO REPORT “BEHIND THE SCENES WITH DATA AT THE IMF: AN IEO EVALUATION”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper sets out Management’s response to the Independent Evaluation Office’s (IEO) report entitled *Behind the Scenes with Data at the IMF: An IEO Evaluation*.

The implementation plan proposes specific actions to address the recommendations of the IEO that were endorsed by the Board in its March 17, 2016 discussion of the IEO’s report, namely: (i) develop a long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund; (ii) define and prioritize the Fund’s data needs and support data provision by member countries accordingly; (iii) reconsider the role and mandate of the Statistics Department; (iv) reexamine the staff’s structure of incentives in the area of data management; (v) make clear the limits of IMF responsibility regarding the quality of disseminated data, and clarify the distinction between “IMF data” and “official data.”

The implementation of some of these proposed actions is already underway. The paper also explains how implementation will be monitored.

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INTRODUCTION

1. This paper lays out a forward-looking management implementation plan (MIP) for the IEO evaluation “Behind the Scenes with Data at the IMF.” During the Board discussion of the report, Executive Directors broadly supported the report’s main findings and recommendations, and noted that the Managing Director also broadly endorsed the recommendations, albeit with some qualifications, mainly to avoid prejudging the outcome of the upcoming strategic review. Directors noted that high-quality and timely data play a vital role in enabling the Fund to fulfill its mandate, and were encouraged by the report’s finding that data provision has improved markedly over time. They agreed that the Statistics Department (STA) has served the membership well through its dissemination of high-quality methodological manuals and the technical assistance and training it provides to members. At the same time, Directors noted that there is scope to further enhance data quality and availability and re-examine institutional constraints. They noted the efforts already underway, including the reforms delivered by the Fund-wide data management governance structure, and expected the Common Surveillance Databases, once fully operational, to become a cornerstone of the Fund’s new data infrastructure. Against this background, Directors welcomed the evaluation and recommendations of the IEO as supportive of continued improvements. This implementation plan proposes a range of actions to address the recommendations of the evaluation.

IEO RECOMMENDATIONS AND BOARD REACTIONS

2. **The IEO evaluation contains five key recommendations which aim to enable the Fund to meet its evolving data and statistical needs, manage data and statistics effectively, and orient the Fund’s statistical activities to meet the needs of the international community.** These are:

- Develop a long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund.
- Define and prioritize the Fund’s data needs and support data provision by member countries accordingly.
- Reconsider the role and mandate of the Statistics Department.
- Reexamine the staff’s structure of incentives in the area of data management.
- Make clear the limits of IMF responsibility regarding the quality of disseminated data, and clarify the distinction between “IMF data” and “official data.”

3. During the Board discussion, Executive Directors put forth their views on how the issues raised by the report could best be addressed.

- Directors endorsed the recommendation to develop a long-term overarching strategy for data and statistics to provide a common institutional objective and acknowledge data as a strategic asset. The strategy would reinforce initiatives already underway to develop a data management strategy. It will include a review of the Fund's data needs; ways to further improve data collection, transformation, and dissemination; the candid reporting of data shortfalls and remedial steps; and a view of how the Fund can stay at the forefront of data and statistical developments. Directors acknowledged that the decision on Management oversight of STA and the data management structure will be part of the strategic review.
- Directors agreed to define and prioritize the Fund's data needs and support data provision by members. They stressed that the Fund's minimum data requirements should be prioritized taking into account benefits, costs, and budgetary implications of additional data. They encouraged the staff to make more use of data already publicly available, and to leverage data produced by other institutions. Directors stressed that the Fund should continue to promote data provision by members through capacity development and the Fund's data dissemination initiatives, particularly in resource-constrained, low-income countries.
- Directors supported to reconsider the role and mandate of STA to further support the Fund's core operations, noting that STA is already devoting more attention to the provision of services to the Fund, and looked forward to continued progress and closer collaboration with area departments. Directors generally considered that a decision on whether to move the data management structure into STA as recommended by the IEO should be taken in the context of the long-term strategy.
- Directors welcomed the work underway to strengthen staff incentives and accountability for data management and the IEO suggestions to review incentives for staff to candidly assess and discuss data issues in Article IV and FSAP reports where weaknesses in data quality could significantly hamper surveillance. They agreed to consider this issue and whether to fully integrate the statistical issues appendix into Article IV reports in the next Review of Data Provision to the Fund for Surveillance, scheduled for 2017.
- Directors supported the need to clarify the limits of the Fund's responsibility for the quality of disseminated data, including for published data and metadata, given that their quality depends member country provision. They agreed that the distinction should be clarified between "IMF data," used for Fund surveillance and "official data" collected by STA but not vetted by the Fund. A few Directors underscored the importance of building members' capacity to produce high-quality data. Directors generally saw merit in moving toward a more open data policy, while underscoring the importance of safeguarding confidentiality, and a few Directors urged caution in moving in this direction.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

4. This MIP proposes specific actions to address the recommendations of the IEO that were endorsed by the Board and sets out how these will be monitored. The effectiveness and scope of these measures will continue to be reviewed and adjusted as and when warranted. The proposed measures are as follows:¹

Recommendation 1: Develop a long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund.

- Overall Objective:** A long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund will be developed to integrate Fund-wide work streams on data provision by member countries, international statistical standards, capacity development, and data management with a common institutional objective. The strategy will acknowledge data as a strategic asset and reinforce the role of the various data users undertaking surveillance activities. The decision on management oversight of STA and the data management structure will be part of the strategic review, which will seek to develop a cohesive framework based on initiatives already established and underway, including a medium term data management strategy. These frameworks and initiatives will guide ongoing work until the approval of the strategy, which will also incorporate proposals for the Fund to stay at the forefront of data, statistical, and IT developments such as open data, big data and data security. The long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund will also outline the modalities for overseeing the implementation of the strategy. A task-force appointed by Management—including representatives from EDT, STA, SPR, and other relevant departments—will prepare the strategy within one year, measured starting from the time that the required resources are in place. The terms of reference of the Task Force will be submitted to Management for approval by early November 2016.

Recommendation 2: Define and prioritize the Fund's data needs and support data provision by member countries accordingly.

- Meet Evolving Data Needs:** Comprehensive Surveillance Reviews (previously Triannual Surveillance Reviews, TSR) and its interim reports will continue to guide priorities regarding the Fund's evolving data and statistical needs for bilateral and multilateral surveillance activities, including FSAPs. These priorities will be operationalized in Reviews of Data Provision to the Fund for Surveillance Purposes (DPF). The next DPF scheduled for FY 18 will address the recommendations of the 2014 TSR and the FY17 CSR Interim Report, weighing the benefits and costs of new data sets to make better use of data already publicly available for surveillance, and to leverage data produced by other institutions. Work on statistical methodologies, dissemination standards, and capacity development activities will be aligned with these priorities to ensure that data and statistics provide effective support for Fund

¹ Annex I summarizes the evaluation's recommendations, Directors' responses, proposed measures, timelines, and responsibilities for implementation.

operations. The next DPF will also: propose how to incorporate results of the new data ROSCs into a revised statistical issues appendix (SIA), review the requirement to discuss the SIA in the main body of the Article IV staff report, and clarify the Fund's confidentiality protocols to reassure member countries in the voluntary provision of data.

- **Align data provision by member countries—to the extent feasible—with the broader initiative to promote publication of data required for surveillance by the Fund:** Area departments will continue to be member countries' key interlocutors on data provision to the Fund. In consultation with SPR, STA will continue to support these activities and overall data transparency through implementation of the recently endorsed update of the data dissemination standards, comprising the enhanced General Data Dissemination System (e-GDDS), the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS), and the SDDS Plus. The e-GDDS, focused on low-income countries, aims at the publication of data supplied to the Fund for surveillance in a timely and disciplined manner according to an advance release calendar, including through capacity development for open data. The tenth review of the IMF's data dissemination initiatives scheduled for FY2019 will seek to pull together the frameworks above, including new technologies for data provision, such as open data. The data ROSC will be revisited to help guide the assessment of data adequacy for surveillance.

Recommendation 3: *Reconsider the role and mandate of the Statistics Department.*

- The role and mandate of STA will be revisited to ensure it is in line with the Fund core operations. The decision on whether to move the new data management structure into STA will be taken in the context of the long-term strategy. Drawing on ongoing reforms, a time-bound, concrete plan will be developed to ensure that STA's work support data provision by member countries, international statistical standards, dissemination initiatives, capacity development, and fund-wide operational data management functions.
- **Data Provision:** STA will increase its support of data provision to the Fund, by ensuring that work on international statistical standards and capacity development help address the needs of the area and functional departments. The department will also review its operations and IT infrastructure in consultation with ITD with the aim to continue to improve its data sharing and databases, and assess the continued relevance of the Fund's flagship data publications.
- **International Statistical Standards:** STA is already playing a leading role in the international community as a standard setter in compilation methodologies for macroeconomic and financial statistics as well as dissemination standards. STA will take a more pro-active and structured consultation of area and relevant functional departments on surveillance priorities for methodological work, taking into account the specific needs and statistical capacity of the member countries, ranging from advanced economies (digital economy) to fragile states (to develop guidance for compiling data in fragile states). STA will further contribute to the development of member country statistics through its leading role in international statistical forums, such as the Inter Agency Group on Economic and Financial Statistics, and the G-20 Data Gaps Initiative.

- Capacity Development:** The ongoing efforts by STA to align capacity development (CD) activities with Fund priorities and membership needs will continue. CD to fragile states, vulnerable, and program countries will increasingly be geared toward closing data gaps hampering surveillance, ratcheting up data quality and broadening data dissemination to help detect economic vulnerabilities and risks and improve economic decision-making. Consistent with established Fund priorities, greater attention will be devoted to CD to fragile states and vulnerable program countries, while also fostering greater integration with surveillance and reaping synergies between TA and training. Among other things, STA will work with other departments to continuously adjust its CD product mix, venture into online learning, implement a results-based management (RBM) framework, broaden and diversify the funding of its CD, participate in the design and implementation of the Fund's new CD evaluation framework, and overhaul its approach to TA documentation so as to enhance understanding and buy-in from senior policy makers in-country and area department teams.

Recommendation 4: *Reexamine the staff's structure of incentives in the area of data management.*

- Data Management Guidelines.** Staff incentives and accountability for data management will be reviewed, drawing on the experience acquired in implementing the EDSC guidelines. The intention is to promote best practice throughout the Fund including through work already underway on the medium term data management strategy (MTDMS) to develop Fund-wide data management standards and at aligning departmental data management guidelines. Engraining best practice will be closely linked to the ongoing initiatives of the Common Surveillance Databases and the Economic Data Registry. The sharing of data within the institution will be greatly facilitated by further work on metadata and on the Catalogue of Time Series. The Common Surveillance Databases will help reduce costs of data sharing, in addition to providing tools for richer bilateral and multilateral surveillance analysis. The review will assess any gaps in data management guidelines, and seek to bolster practices of monitoring of compliance including with regard to more stringent metadata requirements
- Prominence of data issues in bilateral surveillance.** Staff incentives to candidly discuss data weaknesses at the policy consultation stage will be addressed in the DPF Surveillance paper. This review will inter alia consider how to integrate the statistical issues appendix into the main body of the Article IV reports and other avenues to reinforce Staff's ownership on potential data issues consistently with existing policy. The revised data ROSC will be reflected in the DPF, and will provide an objective basis for assessing data adequacy for surveillance in line with the Fund's needs and the authorities' capacity.

Recommendation 5: *Make clear the limits of IMF responsibility regarding the quality of disseminated data, and clarify the distinction between "IMF data" and "official data."*

- The ongoing work to make the Common Surveillance Databases (CSD) the cornerstone of the Fund's new data infrastructure will be completed. The CSD will serve as a useful tool in identifying and referencing discrepancies between "IMF data" and "official data" as reported by member countries.

- Progress has been made over the last few years towards a more holistic and consistent data approach covering all types of data used in the Fund, including the differences between official data, which are data provided by the authorities, and data used by area and functional departments in surveillance activities. However, staff will review and monitor the adequacy and accessibility of metadata in all IMF publications with a view to achieving clearer and more transparent disclosure about sources, methodological foundations, vintage, and clearly distinguishing data provided by the authorities and IMF data. This should allow users to reconcile different data by making more metadata available, including under the Fund's Data Standards Initiatives.
- The Fund will intensify efforts to encourage member countries to disseminate data with sufficient metadata to help users to make their own judgement on the quality of the data and to understand differences in data from different sources. In its capacity development to assist countries to compile high quality data, staff will also assist countries to prepare adequate metadata.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5. The new initiatives outlined above would have resource costs. Although some components of the deliverables underlying these recommendations can be covered by reallocating existing resources, the development and implementation of some new initiatives included in the overall strategy such as the data management strategy, as well as the STA's plan to better support Fund core operations, will require additional budgetary resources. Specifically:

- Recommendation #1 to develop a long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund will require one additional FTE (staff or contractual) for EDT for drafting the data management component of the strategy, and one consultant (one-off cost of USD250,000) for the execution of a data maturity study; the additional burden placed on the Fund's Data Governance bodies (EDSC and EDGG) to review the strategy will be met through reallocation.²
- Recommendation #2 to define and prioritize the Fund's data needs and support data provision by member countries will be met through reallocating existing resources. However, the conceptual work and piloting of the revised Data ROSC will be assessed in the context of the FY2018 budget.
- Recommendation #3 to reconsider the role and mandate of the Statistics Department and to develop the associated changes will require 1 FTE in STA as a one-off cost, while future recurrent costs will depend on the results of this work.

² STA's contribution to the strategy will be covered by the resource required under recommendation 3.

- Recommendation #4 to examine the staff's structure of incentives in the area of data management will require 3 FTEs during the project phase, including one FTE for EDT to coordinate the effort, and 2 FTEs in Area Departments (0.5 research assistants assigned to each of the Area Departments) to clean up existing metadata; it is estimated that 2 FTEs (0.4 research assistants assigned to each of the Area Departments) will be required as recurrent costs to maintain metadata going forward.
- Recommendation #5 to clarify the distinction between "IMF data" and "official statistics" will be met through reallocating existing resources.

6. Overall the resources required to implement these recommendations will amount to nearly \$1.1 million in one-off costs (Annex II). Resource estimates for recurrent costs were not developed at this stage because they will depend on the specific nature of the strategies or long-term plans that will be developed; as work progresses in these areas, future resource cost estimates will be developed in conjunction with OBP. The resource-cost of formulating this MIP was accommodated within the existing budgetary envelope.

Annex I. IEO Evaluation of Behind the Scenes with Data at the IMF: Recommendations, Board Response, and Proposed Follow-Up

IEO Recommendation	Executive Directors' Responses	Follow-Up Plan and Timeline	Accountability
<p>1. <i>Develop a long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund.</i></p>	<p>Directors endorsed this recommendation, noting that the strategy would reinforce initiatives already underway on the development of a data management strategy. It will include a review of the Fund's data needs; ways to further improve data collection, transformation, and dissemination; the candid reporting of data shortfalls and remedial steps; and a view of how the Fund can stay at the forefront of data and statistical developments. Directors stressed that implementation of the strategy would need strong and consistent leadership from the management team, and welcomed management's strong commitment to this task. They acknowledged that the decision on management oversight of STA and the new data management structure will be part of the strategic review.</p>	<p>A long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund will be developed to integrate Fund-wide work streams on data provision by member countries, international statistical standards, capacity development, and data management with a common institutional objective. A task-force appointed by Management—including representatives from EDT, STA, SPR, and other relevant departments—will prepare the strategy within one year, measured starting from the time that the required resources are in place. The terms of reference of the Task Force will be submitted to Management for approval by early November 2016.</p>	<p>SPR, STA, and EDT</p>
<p>2. <i>Define and prioritize the Fund's data needs and support data</i></p>	<p>Directors agreed with this recommendation. They stressed that the Fund's</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive Surveillance Reviews (previously Triannual Surveillance Reviews, TSR) and its interim reports 	<p>SPR, STA</p>

IEO Recommendation	Executive Directors' Responses	Follow-Up Plan and Timeline	Accountability
<p><i>provision by member countries accordingly.</i></p>	<p>minimum data requirements should be carefully prioritized taking into account the benefits and costs of additional data requests, as well as any budgetary implications for the Fund. They encouraged the staff to make full and more innovative use of data already publicly available, and to leverage data produced by other institutions. Directors noted that the Fund's existing confidentiality protocols are adequate but could be better communicated to member countries. Directors stressed that the Fund should continue to promote data provision by members by supporting capacity development and the publication of macroeconomic data under the Fund's data dissemination initiatives, particularly in resource-constrained, low-income countries.</p>	<p>will continue to guide priorities regarding the Fund's evolving data and statistical needs for bilateral and multilateral surveillance activities. These priorities will be operationalized in Reviews of Data Provision to the Fund for Surveillance Purposes (DPF) (Dec. 2017).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tenth Review of the IMF's Data Standards Initiatives will seek to further align data provision by member countries-to the extent feasible-with the broader initiative to promote publication of data required for surveillance by the Fund (FY2019). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A key objective in the Tenth Review (FY2020) will be to merge the frameworks of the SDDS, SDDS Plus, and the e-GDDS, including new technologies for data provision, such as open data to expand the provision of relevant, timely, and quality data to Fund economists. ▪ The review of Standards and Codes Initiative (FY2018) will aim to strengthen its integration with Fund surveillance and capacity development activities. In this regard, the new data quality module in the revised Data ROSC (FY2018) will help guide future capacity development and methodological work with member countries to facilitate data provisioning to the Fund 	<p>SPR, STA</p>
<p><i>3. Reconsider the role and mandate of the</i></p>	<p>Directors supported the thrust of this recommendation, noting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role and mandate of STA will be revisited to ensure it is in line with the Fund core operations (September 	<p>STA</p>

IEO Recommendation	Executive Directors' Responses	Follow-Up Plan and Timeline	Accountability
<p><i>Statistics Department.</i></p>	<p>that STA is already devoting more attention to the provision of services to the Fund, and looked forward to continued progress and closer collaboration with area departments. Directors generally considered that a decision on whether to move the new data management structure into STA should be taken in the context of the long-term strategy.</p>	<p>2017). The decision on whether to move the new data management structure into STA will be taken in the context of the long-term strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing on ongoing reforms, a time-bound, concrete plan will be developed to ensure that STA's work support data provision by member countries, international statistical standards, data dissemination initiatives, capacity development, and, if relevant, fund-wide operational data management functions (date to be specified in the overall strategy). • Review data publications, databases, and data sharing within the membership and among international agencies (date to be specified in the overall strategy). • STA will engage in a more pro-active and structured consultation with area departments on methodological work to support surveillance priorities for LICs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced guidance will be provided for compiling data in LICs (date to be specified in the overall strategy). ○ The ongoing efforts to align capacity development (CD) activities with Fund and membership needs will continue. CD will increasingly be geared toward closing data gaps hampering surveillance, ratcheting up data quality and broadening data dissemination to help detect economic vulnerabilities 	<p>STA</p> <p>STA</p> <p>STA</p> <p>STA</p>

IEO Recommendation	Executive Directors' Responses	Follow-Up Plan and Timeline	Accountability
		<p>and risks and improve economic decision-making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consistent with established Fund priorities, greater attention will be devoted to CD to fragile states and vulnerable program countries, while also fostering greater integration with surveillance and reaping synergies between TA and training. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Among other things, STA will work with other departments to continuously adjust its CD product mix, venture into online learning, implement a results-based monitoring (RBM) framework, broaden and diversify the funding of its CD, participate in the design and implementation of the Fund's new TA evaluation framework, and overhaul its approach to TA documentation so as to enhance understanding and buy-in from senior policy makers in-country and area department teams. (date to be specified in the overall strategy). 	STA
<p>4. Reexamine the staff's structure of incentives in the area of data management.</p>	<p>Directors supported this recommendation, and welcomed the work underway to strengthen staff incentives and accountability for data management and the IEO's suggestions. Directors also supported a review of the incentives for staff to candidly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt Fund-wide data management standards (2017) • Unify area department data management guidelines (ongoing) • Undertake metadata cleanup (ongoing through 2018) 	<p>EDT</p> <p>EDT and area departments</p> <p>EDT and area departments</p> <p>STA</p>

IEO Recommendation	Executive Directors' Responses	Follow-Up Plan and Timeline	Accountability
	<p>assess and discuss data issues in Article IV and FSAP reports where weaknesses in data quality could significantly hamper surveillance. They agreed to consider this issue and whether to fully integrate the statistical issues appendix into Article IV reports in the next Review of Data Provision to the Fund for Surveillance, scheduled for 2017.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the Catalogue of Time Series (2017). • Incentivize use of the Common Surveillance Databases (ongoing). • The next DPF will also propose how to incorporate results of the revised ROSCs into a revised statistical issues appendix (SIA) and review the requirement to discuss the SIA in the main body of the Article IV staff report. 	<p>EDT</p> <p>SPR, STA</p>
<p><i>5. Make clear the limits of IMF responsibility regarding the quality of disseminated data, and clarify the distinction between "IMF data" and "official data."</i></p>	<p>Directors supported this recommendation, and agreed that the distinction should be clarified between "IMF data," used for Fund surveillance (such as Article IVs), and "official data," which are official statistics provided by authorities to STA that are not vetted by the Fund. A few Directors felt that such distinctions would do little to change perceptions, underscoring the importance of building members' capacity to produce high-quality data. Directors generally saw merit in moving toward a more open data policy, while underscoring the importance of safeguarding confidentiality, and a few Directors urged caution</p>	<p>Building on the implementation of Recommendation 4, a plan will be developed to clarify the distinction between "official statistics" and data used by area and functional departments in surveillance activities (September 2017).</p>	<p>EDT, STA, and ITD</p>

IEO Recommendation	Executive Directors' Responses	Follow-Up Plan and Timeline	Accountability
	in moving in this direction. The options and costs for moving toward more open data will be considered as part of the strategic review.		

Annex II. Resource Implications of the Management Implementation Plan

IEO Recommendations	One-Off Resources		Recurring Resources
	Description	Cost	Cost
1. Develop a long-term strategy for data and statistics at the Fund	1 Person (A13 or contractual)	250,000	To Be Determined
	Consulting Services	250,000	-
	Data Governance committees	Reallocated	Reallocated
2. Define and prioritize the Fund's data needs and support data provision by member countries accordingly.		Reallocated	To Be Determined
3. Reconsider the role and mandate of the Statistics Department.	1 FTE (A15 in Statistics Dept)	350,000	To Be Determined
4. Reexamine the staff's structure of incentives in the area of data management	.5 RA in EDT	40,000	
	.5 RA in each Area Dept	200,000	
	.4 RA in each Area Dept		160,000
5. Make clear the limits of IMF responsibility regarding the quality of disseminated data, and clarify the distinction between "IMF data" and "official data."		Reallocated	Reallocated
Total		1,090,000	To Be Determined