The IMF Archives for economic research

Using History to Inform Development Policy:
The Role of Archives
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Session: The role of archives in international organizations

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The views expressed herein are those of the author and should not be attributed to the IMF, its Executive Board, or its management.
The IMF is an important part of the international financial system

- Near global membership
  - Represents 188 countries
  - Non-members include Cuba, North Korea, Andorra, Monaco, Nauru, Liechtenstein.

- A mandate for global economic and financial stability
  - Short-term balance of payments support
  - Facilitate expansion in trade, high levels of employment and income.

- A pillar of multilateralism
  - Promotes economic cooperation
  - Complements the UN, the World Bank, the WTO and the ILO.
The institution has many roles, all of which rely on accurate information.
To carry out their work IMF economists get their information from primary and secondary sources

**IMF Archives:** authoritative, reliable content on historical policies, decisions, and research

**Joint Bank Fund Library:** electronic databases, books, online journals, serial publications, data

**Data collected from country authorities:**
- Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board
- General Data Dissemination System
- and data gathered on mission
The IMF contributes to the global information pool by sharing its authoritative data and analyses – in publications, in its eLibrary, and imf.org
The IMF is committed to transparency. Executive Board decisions opened its documentation and the Archives to the public.

**Records are all documentary materials:**
- wherever located,
- regardless of form or media
- produced or received in the course of official duties and
- retained for operational, legal, historical, or other purposes

**Executive Board Transparency Decisions**

- **No. 11192–(96/2) – January 17, 1996:** 30-year rule for public access, on request to documentary materials maintained in the Fund’s archives.

- **No. 11915–(99/23) – March 8, 1999:** Access given to Executive Board documents over 5 years old and to other documentary material maintained in the Fund’s archives after 20 years (superseded 1996 decision).

- **No. 12882–(02/113) November 13, 2002:** Opened Board Minutes and Decisions after 10 years and listed documents that may be published subject to member consent.

- **No. 12981–(03/34) – April 9, 2003**

- **No. 14498–(09/126), December 17, 2009 (Effective March 17, 2010):**

  - 3-year rule for most Board documents;
  - 5-year rule for Board Minutes and Decisions (superseded 2003 decision); confirmed
  - 20-year rule for other documentary (departmental) material and allowed access to archives via the internet

**CURRENT**

**Article 9, Section 5 on Immunity of IMF Archives:**

“The archives of the Fund shall be inviolable.”
Archival material comes from many places in the institution and goes through established processes to be prepared for public access.
Material moves from departments towards eventual addition to the archives collection or disposal, according to approved retention schedules.

Transfer of custody from departments

Pre-appraisal
Review files from descriptions in Records Mgmt system to identify materials of enduring value to keep and duplicates or temporary records to be disposed.

Appraisal
Further assess the value of records, now based on physical review of files, to determine whether they should be kept as archives or disposed.

Arrangement and Description
Arrange the retained archival files into a logical order. Describe the contents by series in the Archives Management system and develop Finding aids for efficient retrieval.

Declassification
Identify, scan, and send Strictly Confidential documents to authoring department. Restricted documents from external organizations or authorities must be declassified by that org.

Disposal

Routine declassification process makes the large majority of restricted documents public.

Archival Collection
In the course of their work, staff and external researchers require access to the archives hundreds of times annually.
Who does research and who benefits?

### Who does research?
- IMF Staff
- Corporate economists
- International civil servants
- Government officials
- Academics
- The IMF historian
- NGO watchdogs
- Journalists

### Who benefits?
- IMF Senior management and economists
- Corporate decision makers
- Policy makers in government such as central bankers
- Labor experts
- Trade regulators
- Investors
- International policy makers
- General public
The IMF Archives is a rich repository of documentation of the activities and decisions of the institution.

**IMF Archives has five major components**

- **Executive Board Series:** the authoritative decisions of the governing body, 1946–2009
  - 193,200 documents full text online

- **Bretton Woods Conference Collection (1944–1946)**

- **Central Files Collection (1946–1993): Selected records**
  - 8,000 linear feet of documents

- **IMF Institutional Archives: departmental documentation**

- **Audiovisual Collection**
  - 500,000 photographs
  - 2,000 recordings
Researchers worldwide can now access a searchable website of IMF Archives holdings’ descriptions and links to Executive Board minutes and documents.
Over the years researchers from inside and outside the IMF have made use of these collections as primary source material. What did they study?

Recent internal researchers look at precedents in the Fund’s policies and operations

- Lending and conditionality policy in the 1950s and 1960s
- Greece loan disbursement and purchase transactions 1948–2011
- Crisis caused by the collapse of the fixed exchange rate system
- Stand–by arrangements for Mexico 1959–2000
- Ireland exchange arrangements and exchange controls 1970s–1990s
- Financial disclosure requirements for Fund staff the last time the Fund sold gold
External researchers study past events which shape our economic world today

Recent external researchers look at countries and collect data and statistics

- Breakdown of the Bretton Woods fixed parity system and negotiations over successor regimes, 1971–72
- IMF relations with Central Asian countries in the early 1990s
- Relations between Argentina and the IMF 1966–1977
- Use of Fund resources for Afghanistan, Somalia, Papua New Guinea since the 1970s
- Board Meeting minutes on the 2006 IMF decision on exchange rate surveillance
- Political and economic dynamics leading to the creation of (SDRs)
- Political consequences of IMF programs in Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela including Extended Fund Facility and Enhance Structural Adjustment Facility
- Statistics on investment flows, foreign exchange reserves, inflation, remittance flows, external debt, commodity prices, interest rates
- Impact of exchange rate volatility on export volume and price in Ghana
- Evaluation of economic forecasts for Portugal
- Bond investment inflows and outflows for Asia Pacific region countries
Why is historical economics research from primary sources valuable?

Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff
This Time is Different: Eight centuries of Financial Folly, 2009

“…our emphasis is on looking at long spans of history to catch sight of ‘rare’ events that are all too often forgotten, although they turn out to be far more common and similar than people seem to think.” (p. xxvii)

- Authors researched and created a data set for 66 countries and 800 years: geographic breadth and historical depth
- Book examines:
  - Defaults on external and domestic debt
  - Inflation
  - Banking crises
  - Foreign exchange crises
- Makes the connection between historical (and current) booms and busts and housing markets in emerging markets
There are many other areas ripe for research in the Fund’s archives

- The case of Argentina: Stand–by arrangements in 1958 as part of a long relationship with the Fund
- The case of Zambia: a low–income country whose arrears on payments to the IMF highlight the need for debt relief
- The case of Russia: evolving membership status and the Fund’s response in a time of political turmoil
Stand-by arrangements (SBA) are a core instrument of IMF lending

- Assist countries to emerge from crisis and restore sustainable growth
- 12–24 months but no more than 36 months
- Financing for a specified amount, on a quarterly basis, conditionality for release based on monetary or budgetary targets
- Normal, exceptional, frontloaded, rapid or precautionary access
- Enhancements to SBA in 2009 to provide flexibility as a crisis prevention instrument by allowing frontloading of access and reducing frequency of reviews
The Institutional Repository of Board documents provides a snapshot of Argentina’s SBA activity over a span of years.
Internal departmental memoranda show the evolution of the Fund’s policy towards Argentina’s economic issues in 1958 and request for a SBA.

The 1959 government deficit, including the current and capital expenditure deficits of public-owned enterprises, will be limited to 350 million. This deficit will be financed solely from profits derived from the new exchange system and the local currency proceeds of foreign official without recourse to Central Bank credit. Thus, it is the Government's intention to eliminate the public sector deficit as soon as possible and in no event later than the end of 1960.

To this end, the total level of government expenditures, including public-owned enterprises, will not be permitted to exceed the 1959 real level until budgetary equilibrium is achieved. A principal objective of government policy in 1959 and 1960 will be the financial reconstruction of the public sector.

The draft of these institutions will be eliminated by the end of 1960 through a gradual reduction of the labor force to economic levels, adjustment of prices to realistic levels and other economic rationalization measures.

The growth of bank credit compatible with stability is estimated at roughly 5 per cent. With such an expansion of credit, the growth in many supplied to the public can be held to about 5 per cent and it can be expected that the growth of the Argentine economy will cause the public to be willing to hold this increase without pressure on prices. Within this framework, it will be the policy of the Government not to relax the present legal reserve requirements on deposits (i.e., ____ per cent on time and savings deposits, ____ per cent marginal reserve requirements on demand deposits) and to permit the banking system to reduce the increase in time, savings, and demand deposits not subject to these reserve requirements. With the public sector deficits covered by non-inflationary financing, the remaining critical source of inflation is credit expansion supported by the Central Bank. To ensure

Draft, November 3, 1958, Draft letter from Minister of Economy, Argentina to IMF
Declassified documents make it possible to see the approval by the Board and the acceptance of terms by the Argentine government for the 1958 SBA
The case of Zambia: IMF loans that went bad

- Zambia’s economic troubles: disastrous external conditions, misguided economic policies, uneven donor financing
- Problems with payment obligations but Zambia clears its arrears
- Another Stand-by arrangement in 1986 creates a crisis in the Fund’s relationship with Zambia in which Zambia became ineligible for IMF loans
The story can be seen in the Archives online catalog
AFR Division Mission Files 1959–1989
Negotiating a way forward on clearing arrears took high level diplomacy: internal IMF memorandum on mission to Zambia and the Zambian president’s view of the same mission
The case of Russia: A rapidly evolving political situation begins with the Fund considering a “special association” with the Fund for the Soviet Union in July 1991 and opening negotiations with Gorbachev’s government.
The Board discusses terms for such a “special association” in September 1991 but the Fund works to figure out how to manage the new work because it is already clear that the political situation among the Republics is changing.
The evolution of Russia and the former republics continues with some of the documents only now coming open to external researchers.

• **Series : EU2 AI Country Files- 1991-1992**
  • “USSR- Legal Framework for Fund Relationships” dated December 26, 1991
  • “Russia Federation- Application for Membership” dated January 7, 1992
  • “Memo from Michel Camdessus to Mr. Boris Yeltsin: the application of the Government of the Russian Federation for membership in the IMF.” Dated January 17, 1992

• **Series : EU2 AI Economic Subject Files- 1991-1992**
  • “Board Meeting on Special Association for the USSR”. Dated October 2, 1991
  • “USSR-Request by Russia to replace the USSR in the Special Association Agreement”, dated December 27, 1991.
And as documentation becomes open descriptions will be searchable via the online IMF Archives Catalog
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Thank you

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