
The Bank is one of the main donors in Gabon in terms of volume of finance, and it has aligned its country strategies with the priorities of the country. However, the Bank’s portfolio has not been successful in achieving results. The Bank needs to focus further on its areas of intervention, and deepen its capacity building efforts, to ensure adequate management of its projects in the country.

This document is an evaluation of AfDB assistance to Gabon over the 1996-2008 period. During this period, the Bank committed UA 338.18 million for 7 operations.

The evaluation team drew its information from reviews of background sector reports, project documents, and strategic documents such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and Country Strategy Paper (CSP). The team also carried out a mission to Gabon in January-February 2009. OPEV’s standard evaluation criteria (relevance, efficacy, efficiency, institutional development impact, and sustainability) and four-point rating scale provided the evaluation framework.
Objectives of the Review

a) Evaluate the results of the assistance provided, and
b) Draw lessons and recommendations in order to improve current and future operations.

Transport accounted for the bulk of the portfolio, followed by multisector work, agriculture and rural development, and finally, the social sector.

The evaluation found that the CSPs were also in consonance with national strategies and programs, including the interim and full PRSPs of 2003 and 2005, respectively. The quality of the CSPs improved progressively, and showed greater selectivity over time—the reason for the recent focus on two of the Government’s four objectives.

Ratings Analysis

The overall outcome is unsatisfactory, despite the relevance of the strategies. The active portfolio also remains unsatisfactory, due to persistent problems such as long delays in meeting loan conditions, problems with quality at entry, and management issues. Completed projects had unsatisfactory results.

Non-lending activity was satisfactory, due to the capacity building efforts, the quality of policy dialogue, and the Bank’s contribution to aid coordination. The presence of the regional Field Office, GAFO, played a positive role in these areas.

Performance of the Borrower and the Bank

The performance of the Government was unsatisfactory, despite commitment to the reform process. There was insufficient Government ownership of aid projects.

The performance of the Bank was also unsatisfactory, despite attempts to increase the quality of the portfolio, strengthen the supervision function, and strengthen GAFO. Bank projects took too long to get started and too long to achieve results.

Key Lessons

1) A major factor in the success of the reform process in Gabon has been the political will of the Government to implement the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), including measures to increase accountability and stop the embezzlement of oil revenues. However, these are still nascent initiatives.

2) Non-lending activities have improved as a result of recent capacity building efforts, studies, and policy dialogue.

3) The translation of objectives and actions into tangible results remains a serious challenge for the Bank; projects are simply taking too long to achieve their aims.
Main Recommendations

1) Step up strategic selectivity within the infrastructure and governance pillars of the CSP, based on high-quality economic and sector analysis and more focused policy dialogue.

2) Strengthen the Bank’s support to private sector development through more active involvement in improving the business climate and direct support to the sector.

3) Prioritize capacity building in Gabon with the specific aim of improving the management of Bank projects.

4) Strengthen support to good governance by improving realization, effectiveness and synergy of actions through the effective implementation of updated legal texts and instruments.

5) Strengthen monitoring and evaluation and the Bank’s field presence by empowering the field office (GAFO), among other measures, to avoid unduly wide deviation from initial objectives and slippages in project implementation.

6) Improve coordination and synergy of action among the various Bank departments, including the Private Sector Department and GAFO, by focusing on a shared vision for Bank assistance in Gabon, division of labor and accountability.

Update

AfDB management agrees with the recommendations, and action is being taken accordingly.
Management Response
Convergence with the findings of the portfolio review:

The recommendations arising from the evaluation of Bank assistance to Gabon for the 1996-2008 period primarily reflect the need for greater strategic selectivity of Bank interventions, based on economic and sector work and more focused policy dialogue. Similarly, they call for more synergy in the use of the Bank’s skills mix to step up the impact of interventions. They also mention the need to improve the quality at entry of operations and build the capacity of implementing agencies and portfolio monitoring and evaluation. Lastly, they call for greater Government ownership of operations. These recommendations are broadly corroborated by the findings of portfolio reviews and the completion report of the last strategy for Gabon (CSP 2006-2010).

... Conclusion: In a nutshell, the lessons learned from the evaluation of Bank assistance to Gabon for the 1996-2008 period will help to improve the quality of the 2011-2015 CSP and its implementation while informing closer dialogue conducted by GAFO with national authorities.

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The mission of the Operations Evaluation Department is to help the Bank to foster sustainable growth and poverty reduction in Africa through independent and influential evaluations. Such evaluations assess the Bank Group’s policies, procedures and operations, review performance and report on results in order to draw useful lessons and promote accountability.

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