What did IDEV evaluate?

Each year, the African Development Bank Group (AfDB or “the Bank”) undertakes self-evaluations of its sovereign operations through Project Completion Reports (PCRs) prepared by the Bank’s operations departments. IDEV subsequently validates the PCRs and prepares PCR evaluation notes (PCRENs) and a synthesis report on each year’s PCRENs.

Specifically, this highlight summarizes the key results of the 2019 PCRENs, focusing on the PCR quality and the key lessons for improving the quality of PCRs.

What did IDEV find?

Overall PCR quality

The overall PCR quality from the 2019 PCRs cohort (65) was rated as satisfactory, with an average score of 2.80, the same as in 2018 and 2016. The percentage of PCRs rated satisfactory or highly satisfactory on quality increased from 59 percent in 2016 to 77 percent in 2019. Nonetheless, only three PCRs were considered highly satisfactory in terms of quality. In terms of sector, the PCR quality is noteworthy for the relatively good performance in the case of multi-sector projects and the relatively poor performance in the case of agriculture and environment sector projects. In terms of region, the lowest average score was in the case of multiple region projects and the North Africa region.

Adequacy of the accessible evidence

The presentation of evidence to justify the PCR scores was only marginally satisfactory overall, with almost 50 percent of the PCRs rated unsatisfactory or highly unsatisfactory. Indeed, like in previous years, this is the lowest-rated criterion due to the lack of evidence and deficiencies in the quality of the evidence.

PCR-PCREN ratings disconnect

The difference between the PCR and PCREN rating scores is a continued issue, showing a gap between the Management
and IDEV ratings. In 2019, the PCRs’ overall effectiveness and sustainability ratings had a relatively high disconnect of 23 percentage points and 17 percentage points respectively. The overall efficiency and the relevance of objectives and design ratings had a disconnect of 15 and 3 percentage points, respectively. In the case of other stakeholders, there is no significant difference but in the case of Borrowers and the Bank, the PCRs continue to score performance considerably more highly than the PCRENs, with a disconnect of 14 and 15 percentage points respectively. This revealed that PCR evaluators continue to be far too optimistic about post-project performance.

**PCR compliance with Bank guidelines**

The PCR compliance was satisfactory with an overall average score of 3.05 for 2019. This represents a slight improvement compared to previous years (2018 – 2.80; 2017 – 3.00; and 2016 – 2.80). The recent evolution of the Implementation Progress and Results Reporting (IPRs), PCRs guidance notes and the implementation of quality assurance training modules in relation to the new operations academy program are likely going to help improve in this area.

**Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) quality**

The M&E quality, improved over the 2016–2019 period but continues to be the weakest aspect. Assessing the M&E systems remains a challenging exercise for the PCREN evaluators due to the lack of information and documentation shared about the M&E system to know to what extent it was implemented and rigorously followed.

**PCR lessons and recommendations formulation**

The quality of the PCRs main lessons and recommendations was satisfactory with an average score of 2.72 for the 2019 cohort (3.10 in 2016 and 2.80 in 2018). However, the quality and usefulness are highly variable and raised the continued issue in terms of confusion between lessons and recommendations.

**What lessons did IDEV draw?**

From the 2019 PCRs, IDEV draws a major wider lesson regarding the PCR quality. For the Bank’s PCR guideline to be useful in practice, the PCR scoring criteria and interpretations as well as the appropriateness of the aggregate score must be clearly defined to ensure that the actual and potential results are as intended and useful for informing decision making and measuring the success of projects.