2020 has been a tough year for the world and for the Independent Development Evaluation Function (IDEV) of the African Development Bank (AfDB), this has been no exception. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost unknown at the start of the year, has dominated all facets of work since then. Despite these challenging times, however, IDEV continued to deliver a continuous stream of quality evaluative products during 2020. In the context of the crisis, robust, evidence-based evaluations were more appreciated than ever.

In terms of its focus during 2020, IDEV’s work has been relevant and effective. The historic seventh General Capital Increase that shareholders announced for the AfDB at the end of 2019 came with calls for a sharpened focus by the Bank on a variety of areas, many of which have been looked at in close detail by IDEV during 2020. I would in particular pick out in this context the IDEV Evaluation Synthesis of Gender Mainstreaming, the Evaluation of the AfDB’s Strategy for Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience in Africa (2014–2019), the Evaluation of the AfDB’s Private Sector Development Strategy (2013–2019), and the Evaluation of the AfDB’s Support to the Energy Sector in Africa. All of these gave impetus to new strategic and policy thinking at AfDB, which will be consolidated through new strategies to be agreed during 2021.

Beyond its thematic work, the IDEV team delivered a range of significant country evaluations during 2020 – for example of the AfDB’s programmes and portfolio in Mali and Egypt – which proved particularly challenging considering the context of the pandemic.

To demonstrate further the breadth of work that IDEV succeeded in delivering, two important impact evaluations should not be forgotten – the Impact Evaluation of the AfDB-supported small-scale irrigation projects in Malawi, and the Impact Evaluation of the AfDB-Funded Ghana Fufulso-Sawla Road Project. It would be easy to overlook these in the context of the bigger set-piece products that the team deliver. However in many ways these impact evaluations are the most insightful of all in terms of providing tangible and specific recommendations that the AfDB’s project teams can learn from and put into practice in other areas that the AfDB lends its support to.

MESSAGE FROM THE CODE CHAIR

Chris Chalmers,
Executive Director for Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom
at the AfDB
On behalf of all of the CODE Committee, I would like to finish by congratulating the IDEV team on their hard but successful work during the year, including not least Ms Karen Rot-Münstermann who became Acting Evaluator General for the second time during the latter half of the year. As my predecessors noted in past annual reports, for evaluations to be successful, it is critical that evaluators, decision-makers, and implementers are able to work seamlessly together – respecting each other’s different positions and viewpoints, and striving at all times to find ways to improve the impact of what they do. This ambition for continuous improvement lies at the heart of all good evaluations, and I am confident that IDEV will continue to step forward with assertiveness and assurance in the year to come.
MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

In 2020, the global economy endured the worst crisis since World War II with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the cessation of normal economic activity around the world in the first few months. The impacts were devastating, both in terms of lives and in terms of the global economy. Africa’s health impacts may have been muted in most cases relative to other parts of the World, but the economic fallout led to the largest contraction of Africa’s GDP since the 1980s.

The African Development Bank’s President immediately implemented Work-from-Home provisions to ensure the wellbeing of staff and got to work to figure out how the Bank can help African countries deal with the pandemic. The Bank responded by issuing the acclaimed US$3 billion “Fight COVID-19” Social Bond in March, and announcing the US$10 billion “Crisis Rapid Response Facility”, all in the aid of supporting African countries in their efforts to respond to the health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous effort by the Bank staff, including our Evaluations team, for their resilience in responding to the multiple challenges and successfully delivering their program of work.

The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic are going to be invaluable in shaping the Bank’s agenda. We are, therefore, fortunate to have created and nurtured an excellent independent evaluation department that can distil and analyze what we have learned, with recommendations for efficiency and better delivery of our services to our Regional Member Countries (RMCs).

The Independent Development Evaluation Department (IDEV) celebrated 40 years of its existence in 2020. They endorsed their enduring relevance to the Bank by continuing to produce highly informative pieces of work even during the often-challenging circumstances
of the pandemic in 2020. These included the usual evaluation reports as well as knowledge products specifically developed to inform the Bank’s crisis response, drawing on its previous experience with the Ebola epidemic and crisis response budget support.

Several policies and strategies were better informed in the delivery of the Bank’s High 5s agenda. The evaluation synthesis of Gender mainstreaming has informed the new Gender Strategy which by all accounts is going to be valuable in the mainstreaming of Gender matters in the Bank’s future operations. The water evaluations have been instrumental in informing improvements in the design of water and sanitation projects in the Bank. Equally, the evaluation of the AfDB’s Private Sector Strategy and AfDB’s support to the Energy Sector have all provided valuable lessons in the design and implementation of projects and programs throughout the year. Indeed, the various Country Strategy and Program Evaluations have provided the evidence and evaluative knowledge that has helped to produce better Country Strategy Papers and hence better programs for RMCs.

As the Bank gears up to support Africa’s recovery post-COVID, the financing needs across member countries will require the Bank to help them mobilize considerable development assistance from a wide variety of sources, given that no one institution alone will be able to deal with the myriad of challenges ahead. In this regard, through the work of IDEV in the recently concluded Evaluations of the Bank’s Partnerships (2008-2019) as well as the Evaluation of the Bank’s Loan Syndication (2008-2019), the findings, lessons and recommendations emerging from these evaluations will be a valuable source of guidance for the Bank’s resources mobilization and partnership efforts.

The collaborative relationship with IDEV has been instrumental in ensuring that the Management Action Record System (MARS), which tracks the implementation of evaluation recommendations, is up to date. In this among others, IDEV’s role is at the heart of the Bank’s ambitions to help African economies grow back better, faster and greener.
On behalf of Independent Development Evaluation, I am pleased to present to you our 2020 Annual Report.

The year 2020 will be imprinted in our minds for a very long time. The coronavirus pandemic disrupted our lives in ways that we could not have imagined one year ago. It has changed the way we live and work. The year became synonymous with working from home, videoconferencing, handwashing, mask wearing and physical distancing as measures to mitigate transmission of COVID-19. Operating in this new context, and undergoing an unexpected leadership change, IDEV showed strong resilience by continuing to deliver on its work program. In fact, it delivered a record number of 20 evaluation products across the full spectrum of evaluation types, including its first Management Action Record System (MARS) report, which tracks the implementation of evaluation recommendations by the Bank.

I want to congratulate and thank the whole IDEV team for this achievement! While some of the products delivered date from previous work program periods and were originally foreseen to be completed earlier, IDEV has amply demonstrated its capacity to deal with difficult circumstances by adapting its way of working. It continued to be a reliable partner for the AfDB and its Regional Member Countries in contributing useful and relevant evidence and evalulative knowledge. In that vein, the two lessons notes that we produced to support the Bank’s response to COVID-19 deserve special mention. IDEV also continued to organize events by taking them online, such as the workshop for Bank staff on Project Completion Reports, organized together with the Quality Assurance Division; the event on lessons from our water evaluations, with the agriculture and agro-industry and water and sanitation departments; and of course, our flagship event, the African Development Bank Development Evaluation Week. For the first time ever, the Evaluation Week was entirely virtual, with all the keynote speeches, presentations, and panel discussions taking place via Zoom. Finally, we continued to support evaluation capacity development, both in the Bank and throughout the African continent, both on the supply and demand sides.
While evaluation needs to preserve its independence to speak truth to power, it also needs to engage with Management to ensure findings, lessons and recommendations are taken on board. Independence does not mean isolation, and engagement is a two-way street. I would like to thank the AfDB Board of Directors and AfDB Management for their unwavering support and guidance and for the excellent working relationships which have helped move evaluation knowledge to action more quickly than we might have otherwise.

2020 marked 40 years since the creation of an evaluation function at the AfDB. The evaluation journey at the Bank has been an interesting one. As we reflect on the last 40 years, we can see how far we have come as an institution, how the evaluation function has improved over time, and how we can continue to improve. I look forward to the next chapter of this journey as we work to deliver on our core mandate, which is to contribute to a better Bank, achieving greater development results for Africa.
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