What did IDEV evaluate?

IDEV evaluated the AfDB’s Strategies and Programs in Mali over the period 2005–2019. The evaluation covered 64 operations with a net total value of UA 729 million approved over that period. In addition, 45 operations completed between 2005 and 2019 but approved before 2005 were also reviewed. Major sectors of support are agriculture and multi-sector, which represent an average of 58.7% of the approvals over the period (see Figure 1).

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

i. Fulfill the Bank’s accountability mandate to stakeholders by presenting the results achieved;

ii. Enable the Bank and its stakeholders in Mali to improve the design and implementation of future development operations in the country based on the lessons and recommendations of the evaluation; in particular, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the evaluation will inform the development of the next Mali Country Strategy Paper (CSP) for 2021–2025; and

iii. Strengthen the national evaluation capacities of Mali.

What did IDEV find?

The main findings from the evaluation are as follows.

Tackling Fragility and Building Resilience

In 2012, Mali underwent a coup d’état, after which Bank operations dropped by half before picking back up again in subsequent years. In 2014, the Bank conducted a study on the drivers of fragility in Mali. The Bank chose to support the country’s economic growth by contributing to an enabling business environment, building the State’s and communities’ capacity, and developing basic socio-economic infrastructure. The country’s development challenges did not fundamentally change during the evaluation period, although they became more severe with the collapse of State institutions after 2012.

As part of its mandate, the Bank contributed satisfactorily to mitigating the drivers of insecurity in the country. After stopping operations after the March 2012 coup d’état, the Bank...
promptly and adequately responded to Mali’s needs with flexible budget support operations and emergency humanitarian assistance, especially in areas prone to insecurity. The Government of Mali commended the Bank’s flexibility in its strategic choices, especially during the crisis.

However, the overall impact of the Bank’s assistance was unsatisfactory. Fifteen years of State capacity-building by the Bank certainly averted the collapse of the State but failed to generate inclusive growth. This is despite the fact that the Bank made significant progress in addressing fragility and building country’s resilience.

**Private sector & civil society**

The Malian private sector and civil society consider that they have received inadequate attention from the Bank, with only 5% of the Bank’s portfolio being private sector operations. Non-state actors provide a strategic opportunity to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth in a context where the State is fragile, lacks capacity, and is confronted with high levels of corruption. Small and Medium Sized Enterprises and Industries (SME/SMIs) in high potential sectors like agro-industry and energy can play a more significant strategic role alongside the State to improve social and economic development outcomes.

**Partnership and aid coordination with development partners**

The evaluation rated the government’s performance on partnerships satisfactory. Aid coordination is led by technical and financial partners rather than by the government itself. Regarding the fulfillment of commitments to the Bank, 8 out of 72 operations were canceled during the reporting period for non-compliance with the agreed conditions. Regular consultation with technical and financial partners encourages the government to fulfill its commitments. There is room for the Bank to strengthen...
its leadership role by leveraging its comparative advantage in budget support, capacity building, and public sector reforms.

Human resource constraints

Human resource constraints in the Bank’s Country Office in Mali adversely affected its performance and exacerbated portfolio management challenges. The number of international staff at the Country Office was in decline from 2017.

What lessons did IDEV draw?

The following lessons can be drawn from the Bank’s program in Mali:

1. **Bank assistance can be selective and flexible at the same time.** In a two-phase approach, the Bank first focused on priority sectors and country objectives, and in the second phase, responded and adapted quickly to the rapidly changing government needs in a fragile context.

2. **The Bank can achieve substantial and tangible outcomes, even in challenging contexts,** by (i) developing strategies and operations in a participatory manner with the government and civil society; (ii) developing projects in synergy with other technical and financial partners; (iii) establishing clear results frameworks based on results that can be measured; (iv) adopting more flexible approaches in situations of fragility; and (v) being more responsive to emergencies.

3. **Effective collaboration between the Bank and other Technical and Financial Partners is essential** in Mali, even without the leadership of its Government.

4. **Building the capacity of the State, which is seen as the sole actor, is not enough to contribute decisively to inclusive growth in Mali.** The private sector and municipalities also have the potential to play strategic roles in that regard.

5. **It is not enough to identify bottlenecks and formulate a plan to improve Bank portfolio performance.** Other elements like adequate human and budgetary resource allocations by the Bank are needed to achieve higher levels of performance.

What did IDEV recommend?

1. **Greater Impact of the Bank on the Country’s Development**
   a. Increase the private sector’s share in the Bank’s portfolio, primarily in sectors of the real economy with a high growth potential like agro-industry, transport and energy.
   b. Increase the Bank’s contribution to knowledge by conducting more Economic and Sector Works and build data collection capacity so that sector choices and operational designs should be based on cogent and credible factual data.

2. **Media Presence and Enhanced Field Office Engagement with Different Categories of Development Partners in Mali**
   a. Develop and implement a communication and civil society involvement plan in the Country Office.

3. **Better performance in the implementation of operations**
   a. Review current portfolio performance improvement plan design and implementation practices, and if possible, involve an independent facilitator.
   b. Encourage project managers to take full advantage of the Bank’s Operations Academy courses to improve the quality-at-entry of operations.

What was the methodological approach?

The evaluation combined a small amount of primary data with a large amount of secondary data. In addition to 44 individual and group semi-structured interviews with stakeholders during scoping, 68 supplementary interviews were conducted. The data analysis was guided by the evaluation matrix and the reconstructed theory of change. Indicators defined for each evaluation question and criterion were assessed, and scores assigned depending on the frequency and the sum or average obtained in each of the six key sectors of Bank assistance to Mali, as per the rating scale. The final score is the simple arithmetic mean, rounded down on the scale of 1 to 4. An outcome-harvesting or/and outcome-mapping approach was used to address impact-related questions.

Evaluation Limitations

The main limitations were the following:

- **Incomplete data.** The evaluation team did not have access to project sites to collect primary data due to insecurity and travel restrictions. The monitoring and evaluation system for the current line of credit does not systematically document development outcomes at the level of intermediate and final loan beneficiaries (SMEs and microfinance institutions). Some data on completed operations were unavailable or inappropriate for the purposes of this evaluation. Some project officers were unavailable.

- **The reliability of certain secondary data is not verifiable.** Certain inconsistent data on operations from different documents have been discarded; others have been reconciled using data from interview notes. Scores were assigned based on plausible or corroborated data (by triangulation).
About IDEV

Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) at the African Development Bank carries out independent evaluations of Bank operations, policies and strategies, working across projects, sectors, themes, regions, and countries. By conducting independent evaluations and proactively sharing best practice, IDEV ensures that the Bank and its stakeholders learn from past experience and plan and deliver development results to the highest possible standards.

What did Management Respond?

Management welcomed the findings of the evaluation. It recognized the evaluation’s conclusion that the performance of the Bank’s intervention strategies and programs in Mali during the period under review is considered satisfactory in terms of relevance, sustainability, efficiency and consideration of cross-cutting aspects, but unsatisfactory in terms of effectiveness, impact and institutional performance. In general, Management agreed with the recommendations of the evaluation, and took them into account in the Combined Completion Report of the CSP 2015-2019, the Country Portfolio Performance Review, and the preparation of the 2021-2025 CSP.