The African Development Bank (AfDB or “the Bank”) sees civil society as a key partner in the development of Africa. The Bank’s official definition of civil society stems from the 1999 AfDB Policy Document “Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations: Policy and Guidelines” and is as follows:

“Civil society encompasses a constellation of human and associational activities operating in the public sphere outside the state. It is a voluntary expression of the interests and aspirations of citizens organized and united by common interests, goals, values or traditions, and mobilized into collective action either as beneficiaries or as stakeholders of the development process. Though civil society stands apart from the state, it is not necessarily in basic contradiction to it, and both ultimately influence each other. “Civil society” is the collective noun, while “civic groups” are the individual organizations that constitute the sector. The myriad of civic organizations in civil society include, but are not limited to, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), people’s and professional organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, consumer and human rights groups, women’s associations, youth clubs, independent radio, television, print and electronic media, neighbourhood or community-based coalitions, religious groups, academic and research institutions, grassroots movements and organizations of indigenous peoples.”

In 2012, the Bank adopted an Enhanced Civil Society Engagement (CSE) Framework to reflect this commitment. The CSE Framework was designed to strengthen and sustain the Bank’s engagement with civil society organizations, to enhance the Bank’s programs and policy documents as well as mainstream and broaden the participation of civil society in managing for development results in Regional Member Countries.

The evaluation serves both accountability and learning purposes. Its primary objective is to provide learning, insights, advice and recommendations to the Bank’s Civil Society and Community Engagement Division and the wider Bank decision-makers, implementers and other stakeholders on strengthening effective and impactful CSE. Concretely, the evaluation aims to identify strategic opportunities and key levers for enhancing the Bank’s approach to CSE and to inform the revision of the Bank’s Civil Society Engagement Framework/Strategy, scheduled for 2020.

In order to do so, the evaluation intends to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. Review the kind and extent of engagement between the Bank and civil society, including processes and outcomes, with an eye for strengths and weaknesses;
2. Explore the nature, type and capacities of civil society partners, and their needs vis-à-vis the Bank’s priorities and capacities related to CSE;
3. Generate strategic and operational lessons to inform the revision of the Bank’s Strategy for CSE.
The evaluation will be guided by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance, the DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, and the Good Practice Standards of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG). The following key evaluation criteria will be used: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and catalytic effect. A Theory-of-Change (ToC) for CSE will be reconstructed to guide the inquiry and address the evaluation questions. The ToC will reflect the Bank’s commitments to CSE, which the Bank has been expected to operationalize at all levels, as well as the foreseen outcomes and impacts of that engagement, including on the capacities of civil society actors and the Bank itself.

Mixed methods will be used, including qualitative and quantitative data collection. Interviews, an online survey and a literature review of internal and external evidence around CSE covering the period 2012-2019 will be conducted. Five country case studies of CSE experiences by the AfDB will be developed, representative of the continent’s five regions and in line with other criteria.

To enhance uptake and encourage the use of findings, the evaluation will triangulate qualitative and quantitative data, to combine internal learning from within the Bank with external knowledge on good practice in CSE. The evaluation process will involve consultation with decision-makers and key stakeholders inside and outside the Bank, during inception and subsequently following each phase of the evaluation. A stakeholder mapping and dissemination plan will be developed and revised throughout the evaluation.