How can we ensure that evaluations become game-changers?

That is the question we are trying to discuss and answer today. I would like to draw from our own experience, IDEV’s experience, draw some lessons, identify some factors that contribute to make evaluation become game-changer through its utilization.

Towards ensuring that evaluations become game-changers: Observations from IDEV Experience

As you know, IDEV is the independent evaluation function of the African Development Bank reporting to the Board, and it is mandated to contribute to the goal of improving the Bank’s development effectiveness. This is to be achieved through three complementary objectives, which are: learning, accountability and building an evaluation culture.

I am trying to look at the way the independent evaluation function is organized in the Bank to deliver evaluations that are geared to utilization and thereby influence decisions that would advance development effectiveness of the Bank.

Basically, from our experience, there are two determining factors for the evaluations to have an influence. They are:

1. Quality of evaluations (including timeliness and relevance); and
2. Knowledge-sharing and follow-up engagement.

QUALITY OF EVALUATIONS (Including Relevance and Timeliness)

a) Work program, work program review and update
b) Well-defined evaluation process
c) Quality assurance of evaluations

Work Program, WP Review and Update. At the evaluation function level, the most important instrument to ensure relevance and timeliness is to have a Work Program that responds to the strategic goal of the institution, and prepared through a consultative process.
a) The WP should present the strategic choice of different types of evaluations which are prioritized. It is usually a selection of self-evaluation validations, evaluation of cluster of projects, country strategies, sectors, themes and corporate processes that have significant coverage of the Bank’s business. The choice of evaluations should address the need for evaluation inputs for the advancement of the new priorities and programs of the institution; in our case, e.g. the Bank’s TYS and the High 5 priorities. This gives good direction to decide what we should evaluate.

b) The other important aspect is the synergy between different evaluations in a given period of time. There are often complementarities among country strategy evaluations, thematic and corporate evaluations. Bringing together evaluative evidence from different evaluations strengthens the credibility of the evidence and hence their relevance and acceptability.

**Review and Update.** Work Program document should undergo periodic review and updating in order to accommodate demands for evaluative inputs to support new policies, strategies or programs. That is why we have an annual work program within the overall framework of a three-year rolling work program. Preparation of the work program is done through a consultative process that considers the demands for evaluative information from the Management as well as the Board. The Board needs evaluative information to carry out its oversight function effectively. Prioritization is done to maximize the impact: i.e. provide evaluative information to assist time-sensitive decisions, also considering resource constraints.

**Well-defined evaluation process.** In IDEV, each evaluation follows a process with definite steps for its implementation, right from the concept note stage to dissemination. It specifies the actions to be taken, who is responsible for what and approximate time to taken.

The steps include: Concept note; Scoping mission; Approach paper; Consultant selection; Inception report; Data collection; Technical report; Summary report; Editing and translation; Management response; CODE discussion; Capitalization workshop; and Dissemination.

Following these standard steps enables efficient and effective conduct of the evaluation. In order to enhance relevance and timeliness of evaluations, it is
essential to have active stakeholder engagement at critical stages of the evaluation process, right from the beginning.

**Quality Assurance of evaluations.** Following the evaluation process helps ensure quality of the evaluation to a great extent. However, carrying out evaluations by following internationally accepted evaluation standards is absolutely essential.

As you know, the quality standards relate to rigorous methodology, scope, content, analysis, engagement, presentation of the report, and usefulness of the recommendations.

Quality assurance of evaluation is integral to the process. The main mechanisms include:

a) Reviews by the Evaluation Reference Group which is composed of experts drawn from all relevant Bank Departments (and at times from the RMCs);

b) Peer review by IDEV staff;

c) External expert review; and

d) IDEV management oversight at key stages in the evaluation process.

**KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND FOLLOW-UP ENGAGEMENT TO ENHANCE EVALUATION USE**

There are several factors that should work together to make sure that evaluations are used.

- Delivery of high quality, relevant and timely evaluations
- Knowledge management and communication
- Continued engagement with stakeholders (basically the Management)
- Formal mechanism to follow up on evaluation recommendations
- Accountability-learning balance
- Engagement with international evaluation networks and organizations
- Inducing and increasing demand for evaluations and evaluation capacity development
1. **Delivery of high-quality relevant evaluation in a timely manner** enhances the chances that evaluation’s lessons are used, and recommendations are acted upon. *But that is not enough.* There is need for **targeted knowledge sharing**, **greater engagement** with stakeholders and **mechanisms to follow up**.

2. **Communication and knowledge management** thinking is integral to the evaluation process. Each evaluation has a dissemination plan identifying the **users** of the evaluation, **timing** and the most effective **instrument for dissemination**.

   We use different **tools and technologies** for this purpose:

   - **Publication of Evaluation Reports** that are written to get the key messages across **clearly and effortlessly**.
   - **Dissemination products customized to the needs of different stakeholders** including Evaluation Briefs, Quarterly Publication *Evaluation Matters*.
   - **A user-friendly website** that enable quick access to the knowledge products.
   - **Evaluation Lessons Database** which can be searched by themes, sectors and countries.
   - **Direct interactions** with the Bank operations staff, management and regional member countries through **learning events**.

3. **Continued engagement with the Management/stakeholders**. There is an increased demand from the Board and the Management for evaluative information for the design of operations, strategies, policies and corporate processes. It has become **mandatory**. This also provides opportunities for the evaluation function to make sure that the evaluation lessons and recommendations are used. Gradually this is building an evaluation culture in the Bank.

4. **To have the right balance between Accountability and Learning.** Evaluations that are **forward looking and focused on lessons** have greater chances of being used and hence have an influence. There seems to be some progress made in building an evaluation culture. Over the years, there has been **greater acceptability for evaluations that carry apparently**
uncomfortable findings and tough messages. The management has become more self-critical in many instances. This is a positive development which encourages the evaluator to tell truth to the power.

5. **Formal mechanism to follow up on evaluation recommendations.**
The Bank has MARS – Management Action Record System. All agreed recommendations are entered into an intranet platform, updated and reviewed by the Management as well as IDEV. IDEV assesses the extent of implementation of the recommendations and reports to the Board. This mandatory requirement enhances the evaluation use.

- IDEV prepared the first MARS report, assessing the level of implementation of the agreed recommendations. Action plans for 77% of the recommendations were implemented though with some delays.


7. **Inducing and increasing the demand for evaluation and evaluation capacity at the RMC level.**
- Assistance to strengthen the country evaluation system by building capacity (SNES).
- Twende Mbele.
- Evaluation Platform for Regional African Development Institutions (EPRADI).

**Examples of evaluations that made a difference.**
- Comprehensive Evaluation of Development Results.
- Evaluation of Quality Assurance across Project Cycle.
- Evaluation of the Bank’s Development and Business Delivery Model (DBDM).