Evaluation Week – Welcome Remarks – Ag. Evaluator General

Good morning ladies and gentlemen! On behalf of Independent Development Evaluation, I would like to welcome you all to the 2020 AfDB Development Evaluation Week. This year we have organized Evaluation Week under the theme “From Learning to Transformational Change in Africa” and we’ll focus on how effective learning from evaluation is linked to the delivery of sustainable development results, against the backdrop of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the next two days, discussions will center on the role of development evaluation in supporting African countries to speed up the delivery of the SDGs. We are excited to welcome Peter van Rooij who will deliver the keynote address on The essence of learning by governments and development organizations in Africa to fast-track delivery of the SDGs in the light of COVID-19.

More precisely, we will examine how learning from evaluations can best be applied to enhance the design and implementation of development projects and programs, and can help improve policies, strategies and processes, and thus pave the way for improved sustainable development outcomes. We will also explore how the move from learning to action occurs and how organizations can learn from the successes and mistakes of the past in order to improve in the future.

In my experience, what is essential to get from learning to action is to have a culture in the institution that is willing to admit shortcomings and mistakes – and recognizes that there are always ways to improve – and an institution that is focused on results, providing appropriate incentives to take these lessons into account. What this also means is that there needs to be close collaboration between the independent evaluation function and the Management of the institution: While evaluation needs to preserve its independence to speak truth to power, it also needs to engage with Management to ensure lessons are taken on board. Independence does not mean isolation, and engagement is a two-way street. I would like to highlight that the AfDB is committed to learning from past experience, and we have established excellent working relationships with many colleagues in the management of the Bank – which has also helped in moving to action more quickly than we might have otherwise. But, as always, there is still room to improve.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is probably an understatement to say we are living in extraordinary times. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to adapt the way we work, including at the Bank. For the first time ever we are thus taking the Evaluation Week fully virtual, with all the keynote speeches, presentations and panel discussions taking place via Zoom. As you will have seen, despite the challenges we are facing, we have a rich and exciting program that promises to be both engaging and informative. There is truly something for everyone and I encourage you to actively participate by asking questions and providing comments in the chatbox as we want these webinars to be as interactive as possible.

I want to also highlight that this year marks 40 years since the creation of an evaluation function at the AfDB. We have thus organized a conversation that I am particularly looking forward to tomorrow, which will examine how evaluation has evolved over time into the department it is today. The evaluation journey at the AfDB has been an interesting one. As we reflect back on the last 40 years, we will be able to 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.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you again to this virtual Evaluation Week and I now invite Acting Senior Vice President Tshabalala to give her opening remarks.