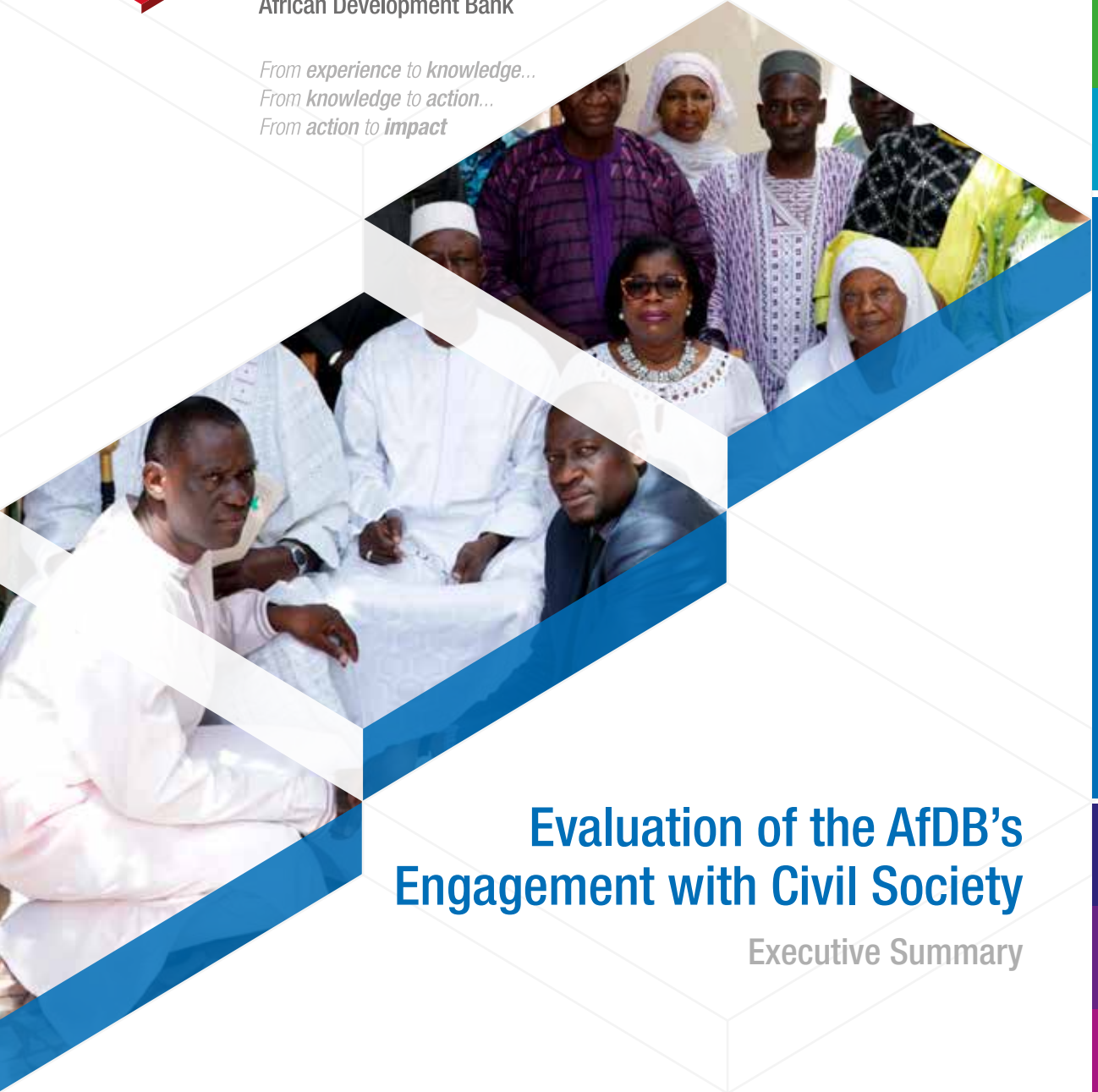




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Evaluation of the AfDB's Engagement with Civil Society

Executive Summary



AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The African Development Bank Group (AfDB, or the Bank) adopted a [Civil Society Engagement \(CSE\) Framework](#) in 2012, later complemented by a CSE Action Plan (2019–2021). The CSE Framework built on the [Policy and Guidelines for Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations](#), which was approved in 1999.

The Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) approved Work Program for 2019–2021 includes a corporate evaluation of the Bank's Engagement with Non-State Actors. The purpose of this evaluation is to facilitate effective implementation of the CSE Action Plan (2019–2021) and to inform the design of a new CSE Strategy. Its objectives are: (i) to review the type and extent of engagement between the Bank and Civil Society, including processes and outcomes, and the Bank's strengths and weaknesses in this area; (ii) to 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; and (iii) to generate lessons and recommendations for effective engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The main evaluation questions were: (i) To what extent is the Bank's conceptualization of CSE relevant and coherent? (ii) How effectively and efficiently has CSE been operationalized in the Bank since 2012 at the corporate, Regional Member Country (RMC) and project levels? (iii) To what extent have the Bank's processes and mechanisms for CSE facilitated meaningful engagement with Civil Society at the three levels and across the three focus areas (outreach, dialogue and partnership) defined by the CSE Framework? (iv) What lessons and best practices can the Bank apply to enhance CSE for inclusive growth going forward?

Methodology

The evaluation used a combination of evaluation approaches. Data-collection methods included: (i) an online survey that targeted Bank staff and consultants (henceforth referred to as "Bank staff") and civil-society actors; (ii) country case studies; (iii) synthesis of evaluative evidence from development organizations; (iv) Bank corporate policy and strategy document reviews; and (v) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The evaluation period covered 2012–2019, which took into account the implementation of the 2012 CSE Framework.

Initially, field missions were planned for the five country case studies: Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, South Africa and Tunisia. However, due to the travel restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, only three country case studies were undertaken (Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya). The selection criteria for the country case studies included (i) regional representation; (ii) timing of the latest Country Strategy Paper (CSP) and whether a Civil Society Officer was involved in its development; (iii) the presence of a Civil Society Officer in the Bank's Regional Office; and (iv) previous and upcoming CSO activities in the country, including CSO Open Days and workshops.

Main Findings

To what extent is the Bank's conceptualization of CSE relevant and coherent?

The conceptual and normative basis for CSE at the AfDB is partially relevant to the Bank's priorities and coherent in key Bank documents.

The 2012 CSE Framework was consistent with the 1999 Policy and the 2001 Handbook on CSE. It reflected the Bank's operational modality and reinforced guidance on entry points for CSE at the strategic level and across the Bank's operations. Although the existing guiding documents (Civil Society Policy, CSE Framework and Action Plan) for CSE are well-defined and valid, they are scattered, and not well known or understood by the Bank's staff and Civil Society. This limits their potential use for guiding CSE at the corporate, RMC and project levels.

What the Bank aims to achieve by engaging with CSE has not yet been made clear. The lack of a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework has hampered monitoring, learning and knowledge management of CSE experiences.

Attention to CSE in the Bank's Ten-Year Strategy (TYS) was reflected in its inclusive growth agenda, acknowledging the private sector and Civil Society as key development partners, and through cross-cutting themes, namely gender, anti-corruption and governance. The evaluation found that the subsequent CSE Action Plans issued after the 2012 CSE Framework had missed the opportunity to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030, driven by the principle of inclusion and "Leaving No One Behind."

The Bank's strategic and convening positioning has not fully reflected CSE in the design of the Bank's strategies and priorities, and its dialogues at the RMC level. CSE at the project level is more advanced than at the strategic level, especially in some sectors such as agriculture, water and sanitation. Most corporate documents provide little reference or guidance on CSE. In the future, however, the current Civil Society Division's representation in relevant Reference Groups will improve CSE in the design of new policies and strategies.

Consistent with the 2012 CSE Framework, several noteworthy corporate-level initiatives

have been institutionalized across the Bank, but their uptake could be further enhanced.

These initiatives include the CSO Forum, the CSO Committee and the CSO database that strengthen CSE mechanisms. Since 2012, awareness raising has been undertaken through a CSE-related newsletter, internal and external outreach events, and CSO Open Days. However, their timing (mostly occurring since 2015), frequency and effectiveness are limited by their perceived external focus.

Partnership is a key mechanism for facilitating CSE at various levels; however, the evaluation identified some missed opportunities.

Internal collaboration between Civil Society and the Bank's gender teams has been action-oriented, complementing each team's agenda and strengths with a stronger need to leverage opportunities. Similarly, there was strategic engagement between the Civil Society and Community Engagement (AHGC2) team, the Safeguards and Compliance (SNSC) team, and the Compliance Review and Mediation Unit (BCRM). As far as the governance agenda is concerned, limited evidence was found of effective internal collaboration to achieve common objectives such as policy dialogue, partnership, outreach and communication.

How effectively and efficiently has CSE been operationalized in the Bank?

The Bank's CSE-related interventions were found to be more efficient and effective at the corporate and project levels, compared with the RMC and Regional Office level. The recent staffing-up of the Civil Society Division and the level of coordination and support within the Civil Society team have enhanced CSE at the corporate level, while regional level CSE was limited by insufficient resources, with the exception of the West and South regions. Since the creation of the Civil Society Division in 2016, progress has been made mainly in outreach and communication, but less so in terms of partnerships and dialogue or consultation. The lack of clarity regarding staff roles and the unavailability of CSE-specific operational

tools have hampered the effectiveness of CSE. The ongoing development of guidelines for the integration of CSE into the CSP process and project cycle by the Civil Society Division are positive steps going forward.

Communication and outreach

At the corporate level, the evaluation found progress with respect to disclosure and access to information. The Disclosure and Access to Information (DAI) Policy recognized the pivotal role of CSOs in transferring the Bank's information to affected communities, at the same time as the 2012 CSE Framework was being developed, underlining the importance of disclosure and transparency. However, the Bank website was not cited as the top source of information about the Bank's operations and its engagement mechanisms with Civil Society. Furthermore, low awareness regarding the CSO database within the Bank hindered efficient communication and outreach, especially at the RMC level.

Learning and communication about CSE was limited until the Civil Society Division recently introduced its e-newsletter. Long existing corporate resources, such as the press digest and the CSO Portal, have been under-utilized. Press announcements about country-level CSO Open Days and signatures of partnership agreements have focused on process at the expense of tangible and actionable outcomes. The Civil Society Division has introduced initiatives such as external website and social media platforms to improve communication with CSOs.

Communication is only one-way between the Bank and CSOs. The Civil Society Division uses the CSO database contact list and the website to share information with Civil Society. The CSO survey responses identified peers (network/umbrella organizations) and development partners as the main channels that were used to learn about the Bank's activities (42 percent), followed by governments (18 percent), and AfDB

Country Offices (17 percent). However, there is no communication channel that operates the other way around, except during the CSO Forum. The Civil Society testimonies reveal that reaching out to the Bank's departments is almost impossible at all levels (headquarters, regional, country, project).

Mechanisms for monitoring and learning from outreach activities were limited. The lack of data collection and reporting about outreach activities hindered actionable learning from the implementation of CSO Open Days and other awareness-raising activities.

Consultation and dialogue

The most sustained example of corporate-level dialogue is the CSO Forum, which was started before the release of the 2012 CSE Framework. The first CSO Forum was held in 2009, in conjunction with the Bank's Annual Meetings, and highlighted an internal consultative process reflected in its themes. However, the link between the CSO Forum and the CSO Committee is weak. In addition, the operational role of the CSO Forum was never made fully clear. The spectrum of participating Civil Society actors did not represent the diversity of the African continent, and the Bank's geographical coverage.

At country and regional levels, AfDB Offices do not systematically engage with CSOs. Consistent with the 2012 CSE Framework, the value of CSE in CSP development and review has been acknowledged by both the Bank staff and CSOs. This shows signs of improvement in CSE in terms of CSP development. Nonetheless, the lack of tools, guidelines and resources for CSE at the RMC level has hindered meaningful engagement.

There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of the Bank's efforts to foster policy dialogue that involve Civil Society. Even though CSP and Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP) development drives RMC- and regional-level engagement with the Bank, CSP development

processes have limitation in providing an institutional arrangement at the country level that allows for a significant policy dialogue between Civil Society, governments and other stakeholders.

Partnerships

The evaluation found internal and external collaboration to be a significant driver in enhancing meaningful CSE. Confirming the findings from IDEV's evaluation of the Bank's partnerships, evidence was lacking on the criteria used by the Bank to identify and partner with CSOs, either formally or informally.

The evolution of trust funds at the Bank has allowed it to address issues not traditionally addressed through standard projects, including in CSE. Trust funds have been instrumental in strengthening the Bank's lending and non-lending portfolios. In RMCs with fragile situations, several Bank-funded emergency projects with successful direct and indirect partnerships with CSOs were identified.

Research, evaluation and knowledge generation and brokerage were found to be mutually beneficial. The relevance and importance of strategically partnering with academia was notable, but the lack of operationalized procedures limited strategic linkages to the broader CSE agenda.

Recommendations

The evaluation proposes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Enhance awareness and common understanding of the purpose and potential value-added of CSE to the Bank's mandate. The following actions are suggested to address this issue:

- a. Communicate more widely the guiding documents, tools and mechanisms for CSE (CSO database, CSO Forum, CSO Committee, etc.)

among Bank staff, as well as CSOs, through the use of appropriate media (e.g., internal and external outreach events, publications, website, and mainstream and social media).

- b. Strengthen internal collaboration across the Bank's departments to consolidate CSE efforts by creating adequate space and relevant incentives.
- c. Develop an M&E framework for CSE that clarifies the CSOs' added value, the Bank's spheres of influence, dimensions of expected change, and indicators to monitor and measure results.
- d. Integrate the CSE output and outcome indicators into the Bank's Results Framework.
- e. Prioritize learning and knowledge management around CSE.

Recommendation 2: Enhance the resourcing approach for effective implementation of CSE. To address this issue, the Bank could consider employing the following actions:

- a. Develop operational guidelines to accompany the Bank's strategic commitment to CSE at the three levels (corporate, RMC and project) and across existing engagement mechanisms (including communication and outreach, consultation and dialogue, and partnerships).
- b. Explore alternative funding sources such as Thematic Trust Funds for projects that either involve CSOs as implementing agents or as beneficiaries.
- c. Ensure adequate staffing at Bank headquarters and regional levels (including engagement of focal points at the country level) with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to foster the CSE agenda.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen CSE in policy dialogue at the country and regional levels to contribute to the Bank's agenda of inclusive growth

and good governance. The following actions could be considered by the Bank to facilitate this process:

- a. Provide clear guidance to foster CSE in policy dialogue in the new CSE strategy and operational guidelines.
- b. Set up institutional arrangements at the country level to facilitate policy dialogue between the Bank, CSOs, governments and other stakeholders.
- c. Systematize and regularize CSO Open Days at the country level to foster partnerships. ■



About this evaluation

This summary report presents findings, conclusions and recommendations of an evaluation of the African Development Bank's Engagement with Civil Society (CSE). The purpose of the evaluation is to facilitate effective implementation of the Bank's CSE Action Plan (2019–2021) and to inform the design of a new AfDB CSE Strategy. It examined the extent to which the Bank's conceptualization of CSE has been relevant and coherent, and how effectively and efficiently CSE has been operationalized in the Bank, on the basis of the Bank's CSE Framework. It also generated lessons and recommendations for effective engagement with Civil Society Organizations going forward.

This evaluation focuses more on the relevance and process of CSE, and associated results, with limited analysis of the outcomes. Its methodology was theory-based, using mixed methods comprising a utilization-focused approach and a case-study approach. Multiple sources of information were used to provide solid results and enable the development of concrete and practical recommendations for the new CSE strategy.

The evaluation found a lack of clarity and understanding around what the Bank aims to achieve with CSE, and its value-added to the Bank. However, there has been progress with respect to dialogue, disclosure and access to information at the corporate level, and in developing internal and external partnerships. The Bank has not fully reflected CSE in the design of its strategies and priorities, and in its dialogues at the regional member country level. The evaluation made three main recommendations to the AfDB to address the issues identified.



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