



# IDEV

Independent Development Evaluation  
African Development Bank

*From experience to knowledge...*  
*From knowledge to action...*  
*From action to impact*

## Evaluation of the AfDB's Engagement with Civil Society

### What did IDEV Evaluate?

IDEV evaluated the Bank's engagement with Civil Society at the corporate, regional member country and project levels during 2012–2019. It examined the extent to which the Bank's conceptualization of Civil Society Engagement (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. This evaluation aims to facilitate effective implementation of the Bank's CSE Action Plan (2019–2021) and to inform the design of a new CSE Strategy.

### What did IDEV Find?

#### Relevance and coherence

The evaluation found that 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 Bank's 1999 Policy and 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. However, what the Bank aims to achieve by engaging with civil society was not made clear, and its guiding documents are not well known or understood by the Bank's staff and Civil Society.

#### Effectiveness and efficiency

The Bank's CSE-related interventions were found to be more **efficient and effective** at the corporate and project levels than at the country and Regional Office levels, which was hampered by limited resources. At the corporate level, the evaluation found progress with respect to disclosure and access to information. There was also progress regarding learning and communication about CSE, with the recent introduction of the Civil Society Division's e-newsletter. However, the evaluation found that communication is only one-way between the Bank and civil society organizations (CSOs) and that mechanisms for monitoring and learning from outreach activities were limited.

Less progress has been made on partnerships and dialogue or consultation with civil society. The most sustained example of corporate-level dialogue is the CSO Forum. At country and regional levels, it was found that AfDB Offices do not systematically engage with CSOs, but there has been improvement in involving civil society in developing Country Strategy Papers (CSPs). However, CSP development processes



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

Regarding partnerships, the evaluation found internal and external collaboration to be a significant driver in enhancing meaningful CSE.

## What Lessons did IDEV Draw?

- Inadequate internal awareness limited the use of existing CSE mechanisms and institutional structures (CSO database, CSO Officers, CSE Framework) to enhance CSE, hindering the desired outcomes.
- The lack of a proper monitoring, evaluation and learning framework deterred the sharing of lessons learned and reduced the opportunities to build the business case for CSE. Learning was also hindered by limited discussion of competencies versus capacities.
- Lessons from the Bank and development partners point toward the potential usefulness of a credible and reliable accreditation system for Africa-based CSOs. Such a system could enhance selectivity and mitigate reputational and operational risks for Bank staff in partnering with Civil Society.
- Conducting country- or region-specific mapping of Civil Society in line with the Bank's mandate and development priorities would help to contextualize the Bank's CSE and foster an enabling environment for CSOs.

- The lack of sustained and systemized two-way communication mechanisms between Civil Society and the Bank across all levels (corporate, country and project) impeded meaningful engagement.

## What did IDEV Recommend?

1. Enhance awareness and common understanding of the purpose and potential value-added of CSE to the Bank's mandate.
2. Enhance the resourcing approach for effective implementation of CSE.
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.

## What did Management Respond?

Management welcomed IDEV's evaluation of the Bank's Civil Society Engagement and acknowledged IDEV's recommendations to increase awareness, build a common understanding, and better resource CSE, particularly at the country and regional levels. This evaluation was timely, as Management will soon begin designing a CSE strategy that will outline the trajectory of the Bank's engagement with Civil Society and articulate ways to better mainstream CSE into Bank policies and operations. Overall, IDEV's recommendations are broadly in line with Management's thinking, and Management will leverage these recommendations to inform the Bank's new CSE strategy.

## About IDEV

Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) at the African Development Bank carries out independent evaluations of Bank operations, policies, strategies and processes, 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 activities to the highest possible standards.

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