
What did IDEV evaluate?

The Independent Development Evaluation (IDeV) conducted an evaluation of the African Development Bank (AfDB or “the Bank”)’s Strategy for Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience in Africa (“the Strategy”) for the period 2014 – 2019. The evaluation covered the Bank’s assistance to Low-Income Countries eligible for the African Development Fund and featured, permanently or temporarily, on the Bank’s lists of Transition States over 2014-2019. Transition States are countries where the main development challenge is fragility. During the evaluation period, the AfDB approved 354 operations for 22 Transition States, representing an overall amount of USD 6.48 billion. Of this amount, over USD 440 million was allocated to 34 non-sovereign operations. The evaluation had two objectives. The first was to report to stakeholders about the relevance and performance of the Bank’s assistance to Transition States under the Strategy. The second was learning - lessons drawn from the evaluation would inform future strategies and operations of the Bank in Transition States, and particularly the development of the new Bank Strategy addressing fragility and resilience. The evaluation drew from several background reports, including case studies of four Transition States (Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Chad), and a range of other tools such as focus group discussions and interviews.

What did IDEV find?

Relevance of the Strategy

Overall, the Strategy was found relevant. It is consistent with the Bank’s Ten-Year Strategy and other strategies. In addition, its three priority focus areas - building state and institutional capacity, fostering inclusion and building resilience, and strengthening leadership in dialogue, partnership and advocacy on fragility issues - were relevant in meeting the specific needs of Transition States. The quality of the design of the Strategy was good, although it focuses on responsiveness, rather than prevention, as a principle of engagement. Moreover, the challenges of migration and forced displacements as a source of fragility are not sufficiently catered for.
Approach and Actions

The Bank has adopted a distinct and systematic approach while intensifying its engagement in Transition States, though there are still some major challenges. The Bank made progress in adapting its policies, rules and procedures to fragile situations. Despite declining funds in the period under review, the Bank’s financial commitments in Transition States were stepped up. Furthermore, the Bank undertook initiatives that scaled up the share of private sector operations in Transition States from 8% in 2016 to 12% in 2018. In the countries visited by the evaluation team, the Bank has shown reasonable satisfactory continuity in its level of financial support at national or sectoral levels. While the Bank showed that it was adaptable to responding to countries’ changing needs, it had difficulty in upholding flexibility while remaining focused on a select number of areas.

Institutional Effectiveness

The Bank has made progress in building its institutional capacity to be effective in Transition States, though more efforts are needed. The Bank has moved closer to Transition States even if progress remains to be made. It now has country offices in 15 Transition States. While the Bank trained more people on fragility issues than planned, it failed to train its staff in charge of project preparation and implementation. Furthermore, Bank staff interviewed in Transition States felt that working in these States was not adequately valued for career development. The downgrading of the Transition States Support department to a coordination office led to a 30% decrease in professional level staffing, thus limiting the operational capabilities of the entity.

Reducing Fragility and Building Resilience

Overall, the Bank’s support has produced concrete results, but not enough to significantly change the situation in Transition States. The Bank achieved tangible results in state-building and institutional stability. However, these results fell short of the set targets and the resources deployed. The Bank’s support improved access to basic services (water and sanitation, roads, energy) in the countries reviewed, although the outcomes were sometimes modest relative to the needs of the populations. The Bank’s performance in producing results was helped by the following factors: the Bank’s experience in infrastructure; the Bank’s status as a partner of choice; and its integrated approach, e.g. in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which ensured strong synergy between projects. In contrast, factors that hindered the Bank’s performance in the Transition States were: the difficult economic, political and security contexts and lack of selectivity; the modest budget allocations; the lack of political will to implement certain reforms; and inadequate Bank staff.

Efficiency

The Bank’s performance in terms of compliance with time schedules was deemed unsatisfactory overall. The Bank was late in implementing the Strategy, which had 11 strategic commitments. Only four of the 10 strategic commitments assessed were fully completed by the end of 2019. At the operational level, budget support operations were implemented rapidly (Chad and Liberia), but most infrastructure projects and emergency assistance operations suffered significant implementation delays.

Figure 1: Bank Support to Transition Countries (2008-2019)

![Bar chart showing Bank Support to Transition Countries (2008-2019)](chart.png)

1 UA = 1.37 USD (in December 2019)

Source: IDEV-SAP data
Sustainability

The sustainability of outcomes in the four countries reviewed was deemed unsatisfactory, despite generally satisfactory technical compliance and some good examples of ownership. Sustainability remains a priority concern in Transition States. Several factors explain this finding. At the level of reforms, the high mobility of qualified staff and lack of political will are the main reasons. In the case of infrastructure, despite good achievements, its sustainability is imperiled by weak institutional capacity, lack of ownership and limited resources for maintenance.

What lessons did IDEV draw?

1. The successful implementation of a strategy such as the Fragility Strategy requires the commitment and ownership of all Bank departments, not just the Bank’s Transition States Coordination Office.
2. In a context of continuous decline in highly concessional financial resources, early and preventive intervention targeting identified pockets of fragility will ultimately make it possible to be more effective and to preserve resources for concrete development actions.
3. Allocating significant financial resources to Transition States is necessary to help meet their immense and changing needs, while maintaining allocation criteria that encourage proper performance.
4. Flexibility is necessary in a context of fragility where the environment and priorities are changing, but should not come at the expense of selectivity.
5. Having a partnership framework with other technical and financial partners, CSOs or private sector actors who have a comparative advantage over the Bank in certain situations, makes it possible to maximize the development impact of Bank interventions in any circumstance.
6. Promoting private sector development in Transition States requires greater consideration of the fragility of non-sovereign operations (applying the fragility lens) and better synergy with sovereign operations, while adapting the ADB window’s business model to the realities of local SMEs.
7. Mainstreaming gender and employment, especially youth employment, in Bank strategies and operations is essential in a context of fragility.
8. The quasi-systematic inclusion of a “Capacity Building” component in Bank operations in a context of fragility helps to ensure their success, if is part of a coherent framework based on a prior needs assessment.

What did IDEV recommend?

1. Revise the Bank’s Strategy to make prevention one of its principles of engagement and strengthen the overall relevance of the Strategy by aligning its dimensions of fragility with those of the Bank’s Country Resilience and Fragility Assessment tool, while taking into account migration and forced displacement as potential factors of fragility. Clear guidance should be given to improve selectivity in the context of fragility.
2. Strengthen the presence of the Bank in Transition States as well as the “One Bank” approach in the design and implementation of the future Strategy while continuing to adapt policies, strategies, instruments, rules and procedures to situations of fragility.
3. Create conditions to better mainstream cross cutting issues such as gender, youth employment, and dimensions of natural resources and climate change in the Regional Integration Strategy Papers, the Country Strategy Papers and the Bank’s operations in Transition States.
4. Focus on an integrated approach (strong synergy) for investment projects and a structural approach to capacity building while adapting the instruments and financing arrangements of the Bank’s Private Sector Window to the realities of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Transition States.
5. Improve the motivation of staff working in Transition States by further improving their living and working conditions and ensuring that working in a Transition State is an advantage for their career development within the Bank.

What was the methodological approach?

The evaluation was guided by the IDEV Evaluation Policy, the international evaluation criteria and the Evaluation Cooperation Group’s Big Book on good evaluation practice standards. The evaluation is based on a Theory of Change. The construction of the Theory of Change identified relevant issues underscoring the complexity of the environment in which the Bank operates to deliver results in a context of fragility. The evaluation used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) that triangulated several information sources to answer the evaluation questions.

The evaluation consisted of six components: (i) a review of the Bank’s Transition States portfolio of operations; (ii) a meta-analysis on aspects of fragility; (iii) an institutional comparative analysis focusing on the World Bank, the European Union and the French Development Agency; (iv) e-surveys of Bank and Transition States’ staff; (v) case studies with field visits to four Transition States (Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Chad); and (vi) an analysis of gender mainstreaming in Regional Integration Strategy Papers, Country Strategy Papers and Bank operations in Transition States.
About IDEV

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

What did Management respond?

Management welcomed IDEV’s evaluation of the 2014-2019 Strategy for Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience in Africa of the African Development Bank Group. The evaluation analysed the strengths and areas for improving the Bank’s engagement in Transition States. Overall, Management agreed with most of the evaluation’s lessons, conclusions and recommendations. These are timely as Management is developing the new Strategy and revamping the Transition Support Facility as guided by the 14th and 15th African Development Fund discussions.

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