Lessons from the Evaluation Synthesis of Gender Mainstreaming at the African Development Bank Group

What did IDEV evaluate?

Over the years, various policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms have guided the effort of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB or “the Bank”) to promote gender equality in Africa. As the core approach, mainstreaming gender in the AfDB’s operations is intended to deal with the persistent factors that hinder women’s empowerment and the achievement of gender equality at the regional and national levels.

In 2019, Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) carried out an Evaluation Synthesis on Gender Mainstreaming at the AfDB since the beginning of the Bank’s Gender Strategy (2014-2018, extended to 2020). The purpose was to draw lessons for the preparation of the AfDB’s new gender strategy and to enrich the knowledge base about gender mainstreaming (GM). IDEV did this by examining the Bank’s gender mainstreaming approaches, mechanisms and results in light of institutional, regional and global priorities for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) in Africa. As part of the evaluation, two background studies were conducted: a Synthesis of Evaluative Evidence from Comparator Organizations and a Benchmarking Study of the African Development Bank Group’s Country Gender Profiles. This note presents the main lessons drawn by the evaluation.

What lessons did IDEV draw?

The evaluation drew the following key lessons:

1. The presence of a well-grounded and comprehensive strategy that drives the operational gender agenda and links commitments on gender to implementation is critical for effective GM. This avoids a piecemeal approach to GM and enables sustainable and far-reaching results.

2. Committed and engaged senior management, visibility in resource allocations and accountability throughout project and human resource systems advance GM. Furthermore, Gender Focal Points and gender specialists within operations departments and teams advance progress in GM.

3. International Financial Institutions increasingly seek gender results in specific sectors. The increasing sector focus contributes to improved capacity and improved recognition of how integrating gender into operations is useful. However, attention to structural constraints across sectors, violence against women and women’s voice and agency tend to be under-represented in sectors such as infrastructure, energy and climate change.

4. For deeper, longer-term and more strategic interventions, contextually relevant GEWE evidence, derived from robust M&E, is essential. This includes qualitative impact stories (and their business case) and documenting and disseminating results with operations teams and clients to inform gender responsive investments.
5. Both downstream and upstream GM approaches require cultural sensitivity to discuss GEWE with men and traditional leaders, to shift mindsets, instead of building on existing power relations.

6. Formal and strategic partnerships between different types of entities at different levels as well as inclusive and participatory approaches contribute to advancing GEWE and GM at global and national levels.

7. Consider modalities and entry points such as enhancing GM in private sector operations and combining projects and Policy-Based Loans for integrating gender-related policy triggers through policy dialogue with governments.

Lessons specific to the AfDB:

8. Clear senior management commitment at the corporate and sectoral levels should be supported by internal accountabilities, adequate resourcing and visibility.

9. Continuous and consistent attention to and sensitization about the value-added to the Bank of the corporate gender commitments and practices would enhance meaningful and sustainable GM-related results.

10. Strategically leverage the Bank’s Development and Business Delivery Model processes to align with regional and global priorities by visibly and strategically linking the Bank’s gender agenda to the Sustainable Development Goals to enhance framing and optimal accountability at the Regional Member Country level.

11. All entry points for GM in the project cycle need to be strategically used for maximum impact. Comments from gender specialists during the Readiness Review stage of the project cycle should be considered for project approval.

12. Consistent with the Gender Strategy 2014-2018, knowledge management should be more strategic and deliberate to facilitate effective learning, decision-making and communication of GM achievements, results and challenges for operations and sensitizing Bank staff and regional member country partners. This could be aided by enhancing the consistency and depth of the Country Gender Profiles, their marketing and internal/external use.

13. Strengthen and formalize the internal partnerships of the Gender, Women and Civil Society Department with the Safeguards, Climate Change, and Human Resource departments.

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 experience and plan and deliver development activities to the highest possible standards.

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