Synthesis Report on the Validation of 2018 Project Completion Reports

What did IDEV evaluate?

Each year, the African Development Bank Group (AfDB or “the Bank”) undertakes self-evaluations of its sovereign operations through Project Completion Reports (PCRs) prepared by the Bank’s operations departments. IDEV subsequently validates the PCRs, and prepares PCR evaluation notes (PCRENs) and a synthesis report on each year’s PCRENs.

The 2018 PCR synthesis report validated findings from 65 PCRs, and summarizes: (i) the key results of the 2018 PCRENs, focusing on PCR quality and the performance of the projects, Bank and borrowers; and (ii) the key lessons for improving the quality of PCRs and project results performance.

The report does not include recommendations, as the recommendations made in the 2016 and 2017 PCR validation synthesis reports are still valid and being implemented.

What did IDEV find?

Quality of the Bank’s 2018 PCRs

PCR quality is rated in nine areas using a 4-point rating scale. The quality of the Bank’s 2018 PCRs was rated Satisfactory, with scope for improvement. 78% (51) of the 65 PCRs were considered satisfactory and the remainder (22%) unsatisfactory. The overall PCR quality score averaged 2.8 out of a maximum of 4. Certain aspects require improvement, including PCR ratings, lessons, recommendations, M&E, and compliance with the Bank’s PCR guidance. The PCRs scored lowest on (i) soundness of data generation and the provision of data and evidence to back up related conclusions, and (ii) quality/objectivity of analysis. In general, the PCRs tended to rate project performance significantly higher than the PCRENs. The overall PCR quality improved over the period 2016–2018.

Performance of the 2018 PCR projects

Overall project performance was Satisfactory for the combined criteria of the relevance of project development objectives and design, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. It, however, slightly decreased from 77% in 2015 to 74% in 2018.

Most of the projects were highly relevant in terms of their objectives, signaling good alignment with the country’s development priorities and with pertinent Bank strategies. The relevance of the project design was satisfactory, but the quality of the project results frameworks was weak. Project effectiveness was unsatisfactory, as only 48% of the 65 projects achieved their main development objectives. Projects performed better in delivering outputs than outcomes. Although project efficiency was overall satisfactory, it was limited by substantial delivery delays and cost overruns. Project sustainability was strong in terms of ownership and safeguards, but weak regarding financial and institutional aspects. Projects with high levels of community participation tended to have sustainable benefits.

What lessons did IDEV draw?

From the 2018 PCRs and their validation, multiple lessons have been identified, reformulated, and validated. Lessons in the PCRs generally focus on project-specific details rather than strategic or program issues.
Project preparation and design

- Incorporating lessons from previous projects is necessary for quality project design, but not consistently done.
- Adequate time and resources are needed for project preparation. Rushing such arrangements due to political pressure or emergency contexts risks poor selectivity (of components/outputs) and outcomes.
- Ensuring wider stakeholder consultations is important to effectively capture the views of local communities during the design and formulation stage of projects.
- Projects with adequately identified and assessed risks and mitigation measures are more likely to be successfully implemented.
- Project implementation is likely to be timely and effective when collaborating partners are clearly identified, with clear roles and responsibilities, at project appraisal and inception stages.
- Multinational and regional projects are usually complex and require more time for preparation. The implementation structure needs to reflect the budget limitations and human resource constraints of the participating countries.
- Detailed, realistic, and meaningful designs are key prerequisites to avoiding time and cost overruns in projects.
- Integrating operations and maintenance and associated budget into project design is essential for successful project implementation and results.

Implementation arrangements and performance

- Continuity of the same implementing task manager and team is a significant factor in a project’s success.
- Addressing upfront the issue of delays in the payment of counterpart funds is important, as delays can increase costs.
- Inadequate implementation of a project’s M&E framework can critically limit the available project information for evaluating performance and learning from experience.
- Effective project M&E systems require adequate human capital with the appropriate skills and competencies, funds, institutional arrangements, material resources, and management commitment to using the M&E outputs.
- Project supervision missions are invaluable sources of information for improving implementation quality. They allow corrective measures to be taken to remove or manage any threats to the attainment of project targets.
- Project Mid-Term Reviews are necessary for good implementation and should be done at the most appropriate point of the project cycle; for example, an early Mid-Term Review is essential for persistent implementation issues.
- Multi-country projects need strong and effective joint coordination structures.
- Development of knowledge products and their effective dissemination are necessary to facilitate behavioral change and to guide the design and successful execution of future projects.

Institution and capacity building, and ownership

- Involvement of relevant government agencies and national civil society organizations early in the project cycle is critical for improving the sustainability of project outcomes.
- Effective community participation (in design and implementation) is essential for sustaining project benefits, particularly in highly challenging operating environments.
- With the effective participation of independent service providers, water systems are more likely to be sustainable.

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.