Impact Evaluation Demand For Regional Infrastructure Projects In West Africa¹: Stages of a Maturing Process

Building regional infrastructures is one of the pillars of regional integration in West Africa. To this end, several projects and programmes are being initiated while others are currently being designed. However, only few evaluations to capitalization constraints. The first evaluation demands should come from regional/subregional economic communities (RECs) and regional/subregional development banks (RDBs). Shortage of evaluations is attributable not to negligence but rather to the fact that the formulation of demands for complex evaluations is gradual. Regarding such demand, the maturing process under way includes (i) the kick-start of a better institutionalization of the evaluation function at the regional level, (ii) the regional design of a knowledge map in order to assess the most relevant evaluation issues, (iii) systematic development of five-year rolling impact evaluation plans to describe the potential demand for the medium-term impact evaluations and (iv) the implementation of regional mechanisms for sustainable financing of impact evaluations.
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Introduction

In West Africa, integration is supported by investments in regional infrastructures. This approach is being promoted since the creation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 and of the West African Development Bank in 1973. Yet, evaluations of the impacts of such infrastructures on national and regional economic performance, the population’s well-being and business productivity are scarce. For the moment, this type of impact evaluation is slowly being called for by regional institutions financing development and economic integration, including those of West Africa. For instance, in the past five years, the Investment and Development Bank of the Economic Community of West African States and the Commission of West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) are still to conduct evaluations of the impacts of regional infrastructures; but they have already launched brainstorming on the issue. While the BOAD has already assessed the impacts of seven national projects of irrigation schemes, it has not yet done the same regarding regional infrastructure programmes. So, there is almost no evaluation demand for regional infrastructure programmes and projects. Moreover, the prospects for capitalization require an assessment of the efficiency of regional infrastructures, for an improved implementation of integration policies. One of the major concerns is to know why the current number of evaluation demands for regional infrastructure projects/programmes is close to zero, whereas the lessons thereof are likely to tremendously help speed up integration. Here, we highlight in particular

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Key Messages

1. Building regional infrastructures is one of the pillars of regional integration in West Africa, but paradoxically, only few evaluations of their impacts are available.
2. The first evaluation demands should come from the West African institutions in charge of regional integration such as regional/subregional economic communities RECs and regional/subregional development banks (RDBs).
3. Evaluation demand should be evidenced-based, and requires a maturation process that is as important as both the evaluation itself and the use of lessons from prior evaluations.
4. The process of maturing evaluation demand comprises (i) the kick-start of a better institutionalisation of the evaluation function at the regional level, (ii) the regional design of a knowledge map, (iii) systematic development of five-year impact evaluation plans, and (iv) the implementation of regional mechanisms for sustainable financing of impact evaluations.
5. There is room for optimism, as regional economic communities (RECs) and regional development banks RDBs in West Africa are taking measures to call for the evaluation of the impacts of regional infrastructure projects and programmes.
some factors explaining the very low level of impact evaluation demands for regional infrastructure projects and programmes, and at the same time, we look optimistically at the actions under way that aim at reversing the trend in the years to come.

Our approach is structured around six (6) points, namely: (i) who has to initiate the formulation of demand? (ii) the formulation process of demand, (iii) the start of an improved institutionalization of the evaluation function, (iv) the establishment of a knowledge map to assess the most relevant evaluation issues, (v) the systematic design of five-year impact evaluation plans and of stakeholder engagement and evidence uptake plans, and (vi) the implementation of mechanisms for a sustainable funding of impact evaluations.

The core challenge of evaluating regional development infrastructure impacts: Who has to initiate the formulation of demand?

The first evaluation demands should come from the West African institutions in charge of regional integration such as regional economic communities (RECs) and regional development banks (RDBs). While these institutions are aware of such responsibility, for now they have not yet ordered the evaluation of impacts caused by the extant regional infrastructures through their projects and programmes. This lack of evaluation is not due to negligence, but rather because the demand for this type of evaluation, which is complex, is formulated gradually.

It should be noted that the demand for impact evaluation is not made ex nihilo, as it requires a maturing process that is as important as both the evaluation itself and the use of lessons from prior evaluations. Much has been done to promote impact evaluation. Efforts include the organization, since 2003, of sensitization meetings and trainings within the WAEMU, with the support of the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), in collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB) or the BOAD; the organization as of 2012 of other meetings by The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), with the support of the The World Bank and other development partners; and the Benin Open Days for Evaluation (JBE). These events were important to sensitize people and launch capacity building activities. That notwithstanding, the maturing process for regional infrastructure project/programme impact evaluation demand was not sufficiently emphasized on such occasions. Workshops, training sessions and platforms set to this effect are scarce, and each regional institution seeks ways and means of building its demand. Given the peculiarities of regional projects and programmes, it is necessary to formulate the demand for assessing their impacts as a joint action. Indeed, regional infrastructures are built as a result of multi-stakeholder partnerships—with a great deal of countries, donors and civil society organizations, inter alia—and this makes it complex to attribute the results obtained to a single entity. Formulating evaluation demand as a joint action is therefore a best-practice option, but it is actually challenging to coordinating multiple views on the acquisition of evaluation information. A solution may consist in implementing a structural approach for the formulation of impact evaluation demands, and in minimizing the use of results. Particular focus should be on the various steps in the process of building demand for the
Proposing a demand building approach for the evaluation of regional infrastructure projects/programmes

Evaluation demand originates from the evaluation issue. More specifically, the issues such as those of “causality” (Morra Imas and Rist 2009) induce the matter of impact evaluation. But before turning one or more issues into an actual impact evaluation demand, a process has to be deployed. While there is no unanimity about the steps of this process, some actions can be taken to help structure the impact evaluation. As a series of actions leading to evaluation demand, the process could make it easier to analyse the crash points that curb the emergence of a high impact evaluation demand.

Kick-start of the institutionalization of the evaluation function

Though it is not a sufficient requirement, the kick-start of the institutionalization of the evaluation function is necessary as a pillar for the evaluation activities. This is why the RDBs and some RECs of West Africa have been working to build the capacities of their organizational evaluation units. Since 2012, the BOAD, the WAEMU Commission and its Investment and Development Bank have set or reinforced their evaluation functions and the dedicated structures. This comes in line with their willingness to structure and address evaluation issues. However, with regard to regional infrastructure projects, the structuring process of impact evaluation issues should not devolve upon a single institution. Here, a joint action is necessary, like for the design of regional infrastructure programmes. In this regard, it should be recalled that the development of WAEMU infrastructure programmes—including the Programme of Community Actions for Infrastructure and Road Transport (PACITR), the Regional Economic Programme (REP), and the Regional Initiative for Sustainable Power (IREP)—was jointly carried out by the Community’s institutions, such as the BOAD, the WAEMU Commission, the...
Central Bank of West African States (CBWAS) and other external partners to the WAEMU. Equally, the ECOWAS Commission, the WAEMU Commission, the Investment and Development Bank, the BOAD and other external stakeholders to the Union were involved in the design of the ECOWAS Community Programme for Development. More efforts are needed to maintain this collaborative spirit in the design of impact evaluation demands. Measures are under way to give a regional perspective to the process of building impact evaluation demand, which will be guided by the RDBs and the RECs. In this light, it is expected that the institutionalization of the evaluation function will be reinforced and sustained at the regional level, through institutionalized evaluation coordination platforms.

Design of a knowledge map to assess the most relevant issues

It is complex to identify and sequence impact evaluation issues, as several national and regional actors have to be considered while the knowledge to be developed, sustained or discarded has to be sorted. Therefore, it is not easy to find out a convergence of evaluation needs and to coordinate applicants' engagement. This is why it is important to build an approach to unveil the knowledge needed. In this regard, the knowledge map\(^4\) may be useful, since it may help identify critical knowledge areas and sequence them according to their "criticity rate".\(^5\)

A lack of impact evaluation knowledge map contributes to weakening the consistency and relevance of an impact evaluation demand, especially for regional infrastructure projects and programmes. Designing knowledge maps are likely to efficiently help not only to structure impact evaluation issues, depending on the desired knowledge categories, but also to build a consensual evaluation plan.

The institutions in charge of regional integration could join their efforts to develop a knowledge map that can induce relevant exchanges and insights for useful impact evaluation assignments. With the implementation of the West Africa Capacity Building and Impact Evaluation programme (WACIE) in WAEMU Member States, and in partnership with 3ie, the BOAD and the WAEMU Commission, a knowledge map will hopefully be initiated in the coming years.

**Systematic development of five-year rolling impact evaluation plans to describe the potential demand for medium-term impact evaluations**

The five-year rolling impact evaluation plans are used for planning the achievement of impact evaluations on a five-year period in order to systematically answer a set of questions that can enrich strategic and tactic knowledge. So far there is a scarcity of medium-term planning of impact evaluations for regional infrastructure projects and programmes in the WAEMU and the ECOWAS. The fact that impact evaluations are not considered when formulating regional infrastructure programmes may partially explain this situation. Until recently, impact evaluations were considered as a non-compulsory appendix to the implementation of infrastructure projects and programmes. It was therefore planned and implemented only at the end of the programme and depending on the availability of resources or on the instructions of technical and financial experts working for regional stakeholders. It looked more like a need for accountability or
Implementation of mechanisms for sustainable financing of impact evaluations

To evaluate the impacts of regional infrastructure projects and programmes, an adequate budget is necessary. The lack of a stable mechanism to provide and allocate financial resources highly undermines evaluation demand. Important multilateral development institutions have solved this problem by putting in place automatic mechanisms in order to set a minimum budget for evaluations. Within the WAEMU and ECOWAS, the RECs and RDBs are still lacking automatic budget allocation mechanisms to finance impact evaluations. As a result, there is a reduced number of impact evaluation demands. Brainstorming is under way in the WAEMU to explore adapted solutions to the context of both the Member States and the community institutions.

Availability and stability of financial resources for evaluation plan implementation is a major challenge when it comes to increasing demand for impact evaluations for regional infrastructure projects and programmes. It is therefore important to solve this problem when designing such projects and programmes and to integrate specific budgets for impact evaluations in the financing plans. However, while the accounts of project/programme managers are being closed following implementation, the disbursement of funds for impact evaluation is not always achieved. Therefore, implementing mechanisms to remove such a stress becomes critical.
Conclusion

Building regional infrastructures is one of the pillars of regional integration in West Africa. To this effect, several projects and programmes are being initiated while others are currently designed. Only a few impact evaluations for these actions are available. Yet, the prospects for capitalisation require an assessment of the efficiency of regional infrastructures, for an improved implementation of integration policies. The first evaluation demands should come from the West African institutions in charge of regional integration, namely the RECs and the RDBs. While these institutions are aware of such responsibility, they have not yet explicitly ordered the evaluation of impacts caused by the regional infrastructures through their projects and programmes.

This lack of evaluation is not due to negligence, but rather to the type of evaluation, which is complex and needs a gradually formulated demand. It should be noted that the demand for impact evaluation is not made ex nihilo, but it requires a maturing process that is as significant as both the evaluation itself and the use of lessons from prior evaluations. The maturing process under way includes (i) the kick-start of a better institutionalization of the evaluation function at the regional level, (ii) the regional design of a knowledge map in order to assess the most relevant evaluation issues, (iii) a systematic development of five-year rolling impact evaluation plans to describe the potential demand for medium-term impact evaluations, and (iv) the implementation of regional mechanisms for a sustainable financing of impact evaluations.

Endnotes

1 The focus is on supranational, regional and subregional communities.

2 This includes subregional development banks and subregional economic communities.


4 The knowledge map is a knowledge management system that enables organizations to manage their knowledge assets so as to determine, following an in-depth analysis, the knowledge to be developed, sustained or discarded. It is a decision-making tool (Aubertin et al., 2003).

5 “Knowledge criticity” refers to the level of risk taken by the organization when the knowledge concerned is not partially or totally mastered within the organization (Michèle ORBAN, 2013).

6 The SEEP is based on the approach by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie).
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