Management Response

Management welcomes IDEV’s report on the African Development Bank’s self-evaluation systems and processes (SESP)\(^1\). Overall, Management agrees with the recommendations which are useful in further improving the processes and tools in place to monitor and manage operations quality and portfolio performance, and sharpen learning and accountability. While many of the issues and challenges that this report highlights are covered in responses to previous evaluations and in the Bank’s Integrated Quality Assurance Plan; this management response provides a reaction to this new report and sets out actions to address the specific recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the Bank has adopted a coherent set of policies and strategies for setting out principles, criteria and tools for increasing the quality and delivery of operations, making use of self-evaluation tools. The focus on results has also been enhanced by the introduction of an integrated project quality rating system which includes quality at entry, quality of supervision, and quality at exit for sovereign operations. Similarly, for non-sovereign operations (NSOs) tools, rating methodology and systems have been introduced to ensure quality across the project life cycle.

As already highlighted in three previous IDEV reports on similar topics, the systems require improvement, not least in relation to compliance. Since 2018, the Bank initiated comprehensive diagnostics of the quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools and processes applicable to sovereign and non-sovereign operations, in order to complement work conducted by IDEV. Based on the findings of these analyses, Management prepared an Integrated Quality Assurance Plan (Quality Plan), covering five reform areas, which address many of the issues raised in this new report.\(^2\) As such Management notes that many of the same issues are highlighted in this report, but welcomes the focus of IDEV’s recommendations on issues that are not already explicitly addressed elsewhere.

This report on the Bank’s self-evaluation systems and processes presents a description of the evolution and structure of self-evaluation systems in the Bank. In practice, it focuses on self-evaluation of individual operations (as opposed to country or other strategies, or portfolio level). Within this area, the focus of the report’s coverage is mainly on sovereign operations. In this respect its coverage is similar to that of the 2018 Quality of Supervision evaluation and the 2019 syntheses of the 2016-17 PCR validation exercises, both of which have been discussed at CODE and have informed the Bank’s Quality Plan. As such, it is helpful in broadly validating the directions set out in that plan.

Management appreciates IDEV’s positive feedback on the strong standards and procedures underpinning the Bank’s self-evaluation system, relevance of the tools and processes in place and their broad alignment with comparators’ best practices. We also recognize, however, that there is considerable scope for improving the application of the established procedures, standards and norms, as well as revision of key guidance documents. At the same time, Management agrees that the observed shortcomings are primarily driven by incentives and work pressures rather than the inadequacy of templates and guidance. Many of these issues are covered in the Integrated Quality Assurance Plan, others are also being taken up in the strategic staffing review.

Management appreciates IDEV’s constructive recommendations and indeed the constructive relationship that we have established on many of the

\(^1\) The report draws on previous IDEV evaluations dealing with: i) Quality at Entry (QaE) ii) Quality of Supervision and Exit (QoS); and (iii) the Project Completion Report (PCR) validation synthesis reports for 2016 and 2017.

\(^2\) This Quality Plan is the third revision of a document first drafted in December 2018, following a series of evaluations. It has been discussed with the Board and with IDEV on multiple occasions. The final plan includes 40 commitments.
issues highlighted. Management notes, however, that the report differs from that planned at inception in two ways.

First, Management would have welcomed more analysis on NSOs, Country Strategy Papers (CSPs), and the broader monitoring and evaluation system – such as roles and resources, as these are the areas less well covered in previous linked evaluations. This report includes detail in particular on specific tools used for sovereign operations. Some conclusions, where based on analysis of sovereign operations, may not necessarily be as relevant for NSOs.

Second, in terms of evidence base, the report draws on existing evaluations published in 2018 and 2019. In terms of new data, the number of projects examined on a desk review basis, (12 sovereign and 5 NSO)\(^3\) and the low level of responses to the survey (27 staff) are limiting. However, a significant number of additional interviews were conducted, which has enabled inclusion of staff, management and Board member perceptions.

One useful aspect in independent evaluation is the benchmarking with others. The focus of this benchmarking is on comparing what is on paper in terms of methods used, which is helpful, but information on compliance and resource issues — would also add particular value. For NSO, IDEV might consider in future consistently looking at not only IFC and AsDB but also EIB and IDB Invest.

Management stresses its overall appreciation of the evaluation, for raising or re-emphasising important issues, and the pertinent recommendations. Most importantly, the discussion with IDEV on how to tackle these challenges is constructive and collaborative. Management agrees with the recommendations made.

In order to respond most effectively to the key issues raised in the report, this response is structured as follows. The first three sections address issues around the SESP at each of (i) project (ii) country strategy; and (iii) corporate level. The subsequent two sections address issues that cut across the system: beginning with incentives and resources and followed by the accountability and learning functions. Finally, the response to the individual recommendations are set out in the Management Action Record.

**PROJECT LEVEL SELF-EVALUATION**

The bulk of the coverage of the report relates to project level self-evaluation and coverage is strongest on sovereign operations. The Bank produces Implementation Progress Reports (IPRs) and Project Completion Reports (PCRs) for sovereign operations. For non-sovereign operations the equivalents are Annual Supervision Reports (ASRs) and Extended Supervision Reports (XSRs). In this context, the report raises three important issues.

First, the report questions the rating system in place for IPRs and PCRs. With regards to the rating scale, Management agrees that the scale currently used (in which the middle two ratings do not allow for any nuance) is not ideal and is discussing with IDEV alternative approaches. It will be important to ensure that self-evaluation and independent evaluations use a similar scale and definitions. IDEV’s own move from a six point to a black and white four-point scale, illustrates the same challenge. Moreover, as explained in the Management response to the 2016-17 PCR validations, provided in 2019, Management is committed to improving the quality of PCRs and XSRs, including the rating candour. For NSOs, the recent revamping of NSO supervision tools as part of the Quality Plan’s has included examination of the rating scale in use looking at each of development objectives and implementation progress.

Second, the report raises the issue of compliance, which was also raised in the 2018 Quality of Supervision report and therefore addressed in the Quality Plan. Management is seeking to address compliance issues, including through key performance indicators (KPIs). In 2020, new KPIs have been added relating to compliance with implementation reporting requirements. In addition, the Quality Plan encourages not only strong supervision (including strong IPRs for sovereign operations and ASRs for non-sovereign operations); but also, proactive implementation support and portfolio management. This is in line with IDEV’s observation that the incentives to build a reputation as someone who can proactively fix problem projects need to be strengthened.

On the NSO side, it is the nature of the facility, type of investment and stage of the project that informs the portfolio officer on the level of field supervision required, this is a risk-based approach. This means that there will be times when only one field mission is carried out and others where four many be necessary. An additional dimension to consider is that in most instances, the Bank is a lender (or investor for equity) alongside other lenders. As a result, a Common Terms Agreement spells out the frequency of supervision missions. Such realities of the NSO system need to be considered when drawing broad conclusions. For environmental and financial sector, different type of instruments. The 12 SO projects had already been covered in the 2016-17 validation.

\(^3\) The five NSO projects examined on a desk basis do not reflect the diversity of the NSO portfolio which comprises more than 300 projects, divided amongst real sectors versus

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social (E&S) compliance in particular, and while issues and findings related to E&S are acknowledged, it is worth emphasizing the staffing issues, which are being addressed. This is an important consideration when benchmarking with sister institutions, where the supervision teams in charge of NSOs are composed of up to 6 staff with the required set of expertise (including E&S) while the Bank has only one or two staff conducting NSO supervision.

Third, the report raises the issue of the lack of available validated ratings which management can use to aggregate results data in its external reporting. The report recognises that the reason that the Bank has been using self-evaluation ratings for reporting in its Annual Development Effectiveness Reviews, is because the IDEV-validated ratings have not been made available in time for reporting. As discussed in the management response to the 2016-17 PCR syntheses (delivered in mid-2019), Management very much welcomes the validations. Similarly, for XSR validations, Management looks forward to receiving validations more recent than 2014, to enable the data to be used. By providing the validated ratings within the year following PCR and XSR delivery, IDEV practices would also be brought into line with the existing Operations Manual. Management is fully committed to reporting the validated ratings for any year for which they are made available. The timely availability of validated ratings is something that both IDEV and Management want to address as soon as possible.

The report refers to staff perception of overlap between back to office reports (BTORs) and formal monitoring reports (IPRs and ASRs). The IPR/ASR can be included as annex to a BTOR, which in turn need only be one page including information not suitable for the corporate reporting, focusing especially on actions to be taken. There is also an issue of overlap with the Aide Memoire. Management is looking into clarifying and streamlining reporting requirements. For NSOs, the differentiation between BTORs and ASR has been unpacked in the new NSO Business and Process Manual.

The report in some places argues that staff have incentives to rate project performance generously, because their managers associate staff performance with project performance. In other places, it states that not enough attention is paid to project performance and compliance with project reporting standards when it comes to staff objective setting and performance review. Consistent with previous IDEV reports covering this topic, we believe that incentives are more aligned with this latter insufficient focus and compliance review situation, and the remedy should be aligned accordingly.

A general issue with self-evaluation is guarding against positive bias, especially when the same staff member designs, implements and self-evaluates – as is the case for sovereign but not NSOs. Management is looking at various options to address this, which include further segregation of duties and/or enhanced degree of review and compliance check.

**COUNTRY LEVEL SELF-EVALUATION**

As mentioned above, the report does not include detailed analysis on country strategy level self-evaluation, which includes the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) Completion Reports Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP) Completion Reports and Country Portfolio Performance Reviews (CPPR). Some clarifications on the current situation may be helpful.

With regards to lines of accountability between the CSPs and the CPPRs: it is clear, the country program officer has accountability for the CPPR while the country economists have accountability for CSPs/RISP. Both work with the relevant country manager.

The report questions the weight of the CPPR in assessing the quality of CSPs. In fact, the only formal rating provided in a CSP completion report is that of the most recent CPPR. In 2019, a Board seminar was held to discuss the shortcomings of the current CPPR approach, and work has started to rethink it. In the context of the Quality Plan, management has committed to revise the CPPR methodology, although will do so later than planned to allow IDEV to complete an ongoing evaluation covering this topic, so the findings of that evaluation should feed into the new approach.

Management is examining the option of moving towards a dashboard approach. Such dashboards can be designed to provide a transparent overview of objective information, more informative in helping to identify the source of challenges and lessons going forward, less open to positive or other biases, as compared with the traditional composite rating approach. This approach would not only help significantly to improve the buy-in from CSP/RISP teams in the evaluation, but also allow for a monitoring of the evolution over time of the quality of the strategies and their implementation.

The report talks about the possibility of IDEV conducting CSP validations. To do so, it would be important first to examine the success of the pilot exercise, look at other models, and if opting for the validation model, develop an agreed methodology for CSP completion reporting, to enable the validation.
CORPORATE LEVEL USE
As noted above, the main issue with regards corporate reporting relates to the availability of independently validated PCRs and XSRs.

Secondly, the report discusses the Results Measurement Framework (RMF). The RMF is due to be revised in 2020.

Besides identifying lessons for the Bank, the RMF and Annual Development Effectiveness Review reports are intended to promote transparency and accountability, enabling the Bank and its partners to check to what extent we are on track to achieve our targets. As also explained in previous management responses and the GCI VII paper, the RMF is due to be revised by the end of 2020. In this context, issues raised regarding breaking down compliance for sovereign and non-sovereign operations, as well as the realism of some of the targets are well noted. Management and IDEV have already held a first informal meeting to discuss (i) the RMF review this year; and (ii) IDEV’s planned evaluation of the RMF in the same period. It will be important to ensure findings are available to inform the review of the RMF. Indeed, Management is willing to delay the RMF review to ensure that IDEV’s findings (expected in Q4 2020) can be used to inform it.

An important component in terms of the Bank’s ability to report corporate performance using the RMF, is the choice of indicators used at project level — currently there is lack of adherence to corporate or RMF indicators, which makes the job of aggregation challenging. As part of the revision of the Results Based Logical Framework (RBLF) committed to in the context of the Quality Plan, Management plans to strengthen guidance on the importance of using core corporate indicators where possible. At the same time, the programmed review of the RMF provides an opportunity to ensure the corporate indicators are consistently appropriate for project level reporting.

The Results Reporting System will improve monitoring and ensure consistency of results and objectives throughout the project cycle and will enhance accountability for supervision and completion. It will also facilitate more effective portfolio reviews and reporting exercises and will provide useful information to improve the design of new operations. As explained in the Quality Plan, while for SOs the system is launched and roll-out ongoing following the SAP upgrade, (and now adjustments are being made relating to remote working arrangements); Management has made significant progress in defining a similar system for NSOs. This new system is currently in development and is aimed at, among other things, harmonizing development outcomes’ indicators, tracking and measurement across the NSO life cycle, and better record keeping supporting corporate reporting and indeed evaluation.

INCENTIVES AND RESOURCES
The report rightly points out the critical roles of incentives and behaviours in the use of self-evaluation tools, including those relating to monitoring ongoing and closing operations.

Management notes IDEV’s recognition that project teams and task managers are motivated to help clients deliver results and are committed to the supervision task, but the recognition that effective implementation of the SESP is affected by the broader issue being taken up in the strategic staffing review — inadequate staff in key places, especially given the increasing number of new projects and growing ongoing portfolio. This is consistent with a similar point made regarding workload on task managers specifically in the 2018 report on quality at entry.

Management’s assessment on the right-sizing and strategic staffing analysis concurs with the evaluation finding that there is a need to increase staffing and skills required to implement the Bank’s monitoring and self-evaluation systems effectively. In addition to the workload of task managers, particularly in certain sectors and regions, the Bank recognizes that certain specialised support functions also need immediate buttressing. These include environmental and social safeguards, as explained in the safeguards action plan, but also expert support on results measurement and monitoring, integrated within operations to ensure proper quality check of all SESP products. The project M&E function at project level remains the responsibility of the task manager (sovereign operations) and the origination officer and portfolio officer (NSOs). The results measurement and monitoring function will support the overall system by working to reinforce quality, compliance and continuous improvement of the Bank’s monitoring and self-evaluation efforts.

The Business process reengineering exercise is also focusing on simplifying the operations process, streamlining reporting requirements, and improving systems and IT. In so doing, the emphasis is on effective processes, i.e. not compromising quality as we seek efficiencies.

As explained in the Quality Plan, Management will develop a programme that rewards excellence and innovation in project design, project implementation and project restructuring. Recognising the importance, not only of good design but also, of proactive implementation - including project and portfolio turnaround successes - will support increased focus on problem solving, finding solutions and learning.
ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

The One Bank approach is underpinned by three cardinal principles: quality, delivery and joint accountability. The joint accountability principle is about clarifying and strengthening accountabilities for high quality delivery. The revised Presidential Directive (PD) and Delegated Authority Matrix (DAM) will clarify the roles and responsibilities and reinforce managers accountability for quality and compliance control. These roles will be further improved through operations management systems, by digitising reports development and approvals in the SAP-integrated Results Reporting System and the improved Bank-Wide Program Processing Schedule (BPPS).

Refined 2020 KPIs, which seek to find the right balance between quality and delivery have been agreed. They include new KPIs relating to delivery not only of PCR but also IPRs and ASRs — helping to tackle the compliance with SESP requirements issue — with the KPIs filtering down by both sector and region, thus enhancing clear lines of accountability on multiple levels.

Management notes with satisfaction the report’s finding that the Bank dashboards and the Results Measurement Framework are perceived to be powerful accountability mechanisms. Management plans to conduct continuous enhancement to these tools to further improve the focus on results and accountability. One important aspect is not only the coverage of the Operations Delivery Dashboard, for example, but ensuring that SESP related indicators are discussed explicitly at Monthly Operations Status meetings.

Management agrees that the system, while conceived to serve both accountability and learning purposes, in practice tends to be more focused on accountability, at least at the corporate as opposed to task team level. This challenge of transforming self-evaluation into cross-team learning is one common area across all MDBs. Certainly, learning can be improved, but it is also important to acknowledge what is already in place, including how it can be improved.

At project level, the reporting requires efforts to capture learning: i) at quality-at-entry, appraisal specifically includes the incorporation of lessons learnt, ii) the concluding section of the IPR deals with “lessons learnt during implementation”, and iii) the PCR requires the identification of lessons for each of the four quality dimensions rated (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability). The same goes for the revamped ASR and XSR templates. Of course, the system can be improved, for example, the importance of lesson learning is also being taken up in the ongoing work to revise the quality at entry tools or readiness review and technical peer review. At the CSP/RISP level, it has been the Bank’s practice to prepare the completion report before the new strategy, as a means of identifying lessons of the past cycle to inform the forthcoming CSP/RISP.

One of the existing tools that staff can use to search for lessons related to a particular region or sector is the Evaluation Results Database (EVRD) which is run by IDEV. IPRs are also accessible to staff via the Intranet, and PINS produces analyses based on NSO reporting which is consolidated into an annual report. At a higher level, management has committed to reintroduce the Annual Portfolio Performance Review, which addresses major trends in the Bank’s portfolio strengthened with broad areas for best practices and also lessons to be learnt. In addition, online courses relating to the sovereign operations tools – IPR and PCR – are close to finalization. The Operations Academy will later provide more comprehensive coverage for both sovereign and non-sovereign ecosystems.

Notwithstanding the above, there is certainly scope to introduce more learning focused events relating to different tools, but also different sectors and regions. Such events do take place but not on a systematic basis. Management is also happy to work with IDEV’s knowledge management division on such knowledge-based events. The African Development Institute is also a planning a series of knowledge-based events aimed at internal knowledge sharing amongst staff.

CONCLUSION

Management welcomes IDEV’s recommendations and the constructive relationship that is currently developing to work together to address challenges in the Bank’s evaluation system. Many of the findings are also addressed in the Quality Plan, with several ongoing actions to enhance the tools, systems and processes for both SOs and NSOs. Management remains committed to improving the Bank’s self-evaluation system, including its tools, processes, compliance and learning emerging from the system. The Management Action Record, below, sets out specific actions against the recommendations made.4

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4 Other relevant documents include: (i) Integrated Quality Assurance Plan, Rev3, Feb 2018; (ii) Management response to the synthesis of the 2018 evaluations on quality assurance across the project cycle; (iii) Management response to the 2019 synthesis of the 2016-17 PCR validations.
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<th>IDEV RECOMMENDATION</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT’S RESPONSE</th>
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<td><strong>RECOMMENDATION 1:</strong> Review the AfDB’s results measurement framework and evaluation frameworks across the project cycle to ensure:</td>
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<td>- Internal consistency throughout the AfDB’s results measurement and reporting system from operation to corporate level</td>
<td>AGREED— Management remains committed to having a strong results measurement framework and evaluation frameworks. Almost every part of the system is already under review or planned to be reviewed, from the guidance for supervision and completion to project level results framework and the corporate RMF.</td>
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<td>- That there is harmonization between sovereign (SO) and non-sovereign operations (NSO).</td>
<td>Further actions:</td>
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<td>- Management has committed to reviewing the Results Measurement Framework (RMF) in 2020. The objective of this review is to enhance the framework’s relevance to Bank priorities and capacity. (SNDR Q2 2021). In reviewing the RMF management will:</td>
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<td>- Ensure its level of ambition is realistic and informed by evidence;</td>
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<td>- Sharpen its focus within the High 5s and with new emerging priorities – including GCI-7 and ADF-15 commitments.</td>
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<td>- Management will work closely with IDEV to examine potential harmonisation between sovereign and non-sovereign operations including relating to self-evaluation and validation. Since Management has already committed to re-examine both the PCR and XSR tools, in the Quality Plan, this is an ideal window to examine harmonisation. (IDEV/SNOQ/PINS Q4 2020)</td>
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<td><strong>RECOMMENDATION 2:</strong> Review and revise, in close collaboration with IDEV, the PCR/XSR ratings methodology in use</td>
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<td>- Including the ratings scale and guidelines in order to improve the reliability of the ratings system for all operations, and to better align SO and NSO</td>
<td>AGREED— Management has begun discussing with IDEV possible options. Further actions:</td>
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<td>- Work closely with IDEV when reforming the PCR templates and guidelines including the rating methodology in order to provide more nuanced distinctions between satisfactory and unsatisfactory rating options, (SNOQ/IDEV Q4 2020).</td>
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<td>- IDEV is conducting analysis designed to inform revision of the XSR guidelines to ensure they are aligned with good practice and exploring the possibility to harmonize with sovereign operations’ completion reporting standards. PINS has already shared a revised XSR template with IDEV and will make amendments as per IDEV’s guidance (IDEV/PINS Q4 2020).</td>
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<td><strong>RECOMMENDATION 3:</strong> Enhance the accountability for SESP products by:</td>
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<td>- Developing appropriate indicators and explicitly incorporating these indicators in the AfDB’s top level corporate KPIs, in VPs and Directors performance agreements, and in staff performance discussions. The focus should be on delivery, timeliness, quality, usefulness and proactivity;</td>
<td>AGREED— the new 2020 top level KPIs include indicators relating to compliance for both SESP products for supervision and exit (i.e. IPR/PCR for sovereign operations and ASR/XSR for non-sovereign operations). Guideline revisions (above) will indeed reflect the importance of proactivity in implementation support. Further actions:</td>
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<td>- Ensure the corporate KPIs are integrated into VPs’ and directors’ performance agreements and are embedded in the performance evaluations of staff and managers. (CHHR, Q3 2020).</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDEV RECOMMENDATION</td>
<td>MANAGEMENT’S RESPONSE</td>
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<td>• Encouraging candor in flagging and addressing emerging issues.</td>
<td>• Use the Operations Delivery Dashboard to regularly track the quality and delivery of operations by complex, region and sector. (SNDR Q3 2020)</td>
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**RECOMMENDATION 4: In the context of the AfDB’s rightsizing,**

• Review the SO and NSO staffing levels for M&E, and quality assurance activities, in order to ensure that the self-evaluation function is appropriately staffed and resourced.

**AGREED**—Management agrees with a need for a more systematic approach to strengthening monitoring and self-evaluation capacity. The Bank commits to increase M&E and quality assurance resources. Specifically, Management is the process of creating a new role, supporting quality and compliance for monitoring and results. This is in addition to enhanced training for task managers and portfolio officers (see recommendation 6). Further actions:

• Create five results and monitoring officer positions to support strengthen monitoring and evaluation practices, including providing expert advice to task teams, support compliance with standards and effective implementation of revised tools. (CHHR/SNOQ/RDVP Q4 2020).

**RECOMMENDATION 5: Enhance compliance with corporate self-evaluation reporting requirements by:**

• Clarifying the roles, procedures, frequency and reporting requirements for supervision, implementation support, and completion

• In addition, work with IDEV on an appropriate and realistic timeline for timely PCR/XSR validation in order to feed the formal annual development effectiveness report on the AfDB-funded interventions.

**AGREED**—Management agrees on the need to focus on compliance and timeliness, the revised PD and DAM will further clarify roles and responsibilities and reinforce managers’ accountability on quality and compliance control. Further actions:

• Management will reinforce guidance in the Operations Manual on procedures and reporting requirements and will conduct training sessions to roll out to operations staff. (SNSP, Q3 2020)

• Management will provide strengthened guidance on reporting frequency and requirements for supervision, implementation support, and completion. (SNOQ, Q4, 2020)

• Management will work with IDEV to define an appropriate and realistic timeline for timely PCR/XSR validation for IDEV to provide its validation data in time to feed into the Bank’s annual results reporting. (SNDR/IDEV, Q3 2020)

**RECOMMENDATION 6: Enhance learning through SESPs by improving:**

• Quality of and accessibility of SESP products,

• Task managers’ understanding and acceptance of SESP as learning tools rather than just as accountability tools.

**AGREED**—Final SESP products are already accessible, but more in-depth knowledge work and dissemination of that work would support learning. The quality of the reports is also addressed elsewhere in this management response, in the management response to the PCR validation syntheses, and in the Quality Plan. With regards to task manager knowledge some of these items are covered in the Operations Academy Gateway. Further actions:

• Address SESP products, including their learning role, concretely in both the sovereign task manager pathway and the non-sovereign pathway (SNOQ/PINS Q1 2021).

• Conduct learning and knowledge sharing workshops, /online learning drawing on SESP tools, including one on PCR quality, as per management response on PCR syntheses. (SNOQ/IDEV Q3 2020)