What did IDEV evaluate?

The evaluation assesses (a) the relevance and consistency of the Bank's strategy and operations in fostering regional integration in Central Africa during the period 2011-2016 and (b) the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the Bank's multinational operations in that region. It examines the Bank's strategy for Central Africa and 39 multinational operations approved between 2008 and 2016, comparing the portfolio of operations during 2008-2011, before the approval of the strategy, with the situation in 2011-2016, after the approval. The evaluation also provides an appreciation of the Bank's performance and that of countries and regional organizations. It concludes with recommendations for improvement in the design and implementation of the new Bank strategy and operations for regional integration in Central Africa.

What did IDEV find?

Relevance and consistency of the Bank strategy and operations

The evaluation found that the strategy was relevant in addressing infrastructure and capacity building obstacles. However it was based on a theory of change that was unrealistic on the causal relationships between limited and uncertain resources and expected development and regional integration outcomes. There was little ownership of the strategy by the region’s different stakeholders (development partners, private sector, civil society, and other donors); it was not well disseminated and communicated through the media. The evaluation found no visible effect of the strategy on the design, the portfolio, the implementation and the effectiveness of multinational operations in Central Africa, compared to the period when the strategy did not exist. The operations undertaken were relevant, but there was a significant difference between the indicative and the actual portfolio.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the operations was found unsatisfactory overall, but one of the four case studies did satisfactorily produce its outputs and outcomes (the construction of the Ketta-Djoum road between Brazzaville and Yaoundé).

Efficiency

The implementation of the four case study operations took on average two years longer than the planned time due to various difficulties, such as meeting the conditions for the first disbursement, the non-availability of counterpart funds, obstacles during implementation, low Bank responsiveness to requests coming from the implementing agencies, and the workload of managers. The efficiency of the operations is therefore rated unsatisfactory.

Sustainability

The sustainability of operations is significantly reduced by a number of factors including fragility; financial difficulties due to decreases in the price of raw materials, which negatively affect national budgets;
non-payment of counterpart funds by countries; ineffective reforms of road maintenance funds; and permanent financial uncertainty of the Economic Community of Central Africa’ States. That is why this criterion is rated highly unsatisfactory.

Performance of the Bank

The performance of the Bank was found to be unsatisfactory. Its effectiveness is hampered by a series of gaps related to policy dialogue, leadership and coordination with other donors, and weak consideration of the role to be played by the private sector and civil society organizations.

Performance of the countries

Although countries have ratified key international conventions and have provided political backing to regional organizations, their effective political commitment and financial contributions to regional organizations have been sporadic. This undermines the leadership and operational capacity of regional organizations, including for the oversight of regional operations. The performance of the countries is therefore unsatisfactory.

Performance of regional organizations

The performance of the regional organizations is also unsatisfactory. They are mired with structural weakness, which undermines their internal capacity to foster effectively regional integration.

What did IDEV recommend?

1. Address grand challenges of Central Africa with a commensurate tailored approach.
2. Move from a Regional Integration Strategy Paper to an indicative operational program, since the Bank has defined strategies for its High 5 Priorities including regional integration.
3. Undertake a more active dissemination of the Central Africa regional integration program and associate all stakeholders.
4. Improve policy dialogue at the highest level to increase the level of commitment and ownership by the policy and decision makers in countries and regions.
5. Support the private sector. As the Bank has not financed any private sector operations in the region, it should study how to support the development of private sector operations that establish long-lasting linkages between markets across borders.
6. Consider more realistic business planning than is currently the case. All the Bank’s Regional Integration Strategy and Programs had an extension of two years. The four country case study operations had implementation delays of at least two years.
7. Continue supporting capacity building, notably helping to clarify the division of labor between the Economic Community of Central Africa’ States and their specialized agencies, establish a monitoring and evaluation unit within the Economic Community of Central Africa’ States, and establish a specialized project implementation unit, which could be a focal point for all donors implementing regional operations through the Regional Economic Communities.

What did Management respond?

Management found that the evaluation offers a number of useful lessons, particularly in terms of effectiveness and sustainability of operations, and will enable the Bank to draw practical lessons to inform and guide the new Regional Integration Strategy that is being designed. Management regrets the exceptional severity of the evaluation and considers that it is not justified by the analysis presented in the report, but agreed with six out of the seven recommendations and partially agreed with the seventh.