What did IDEV evaluate?
IDEV evaluated the African Development Bank’s Self-Evaluation Systems and Processes (SESP) over the period 2013-2018 and the implementation of Quality Assurance processes from project approval to project closure (exit). The SESP are the assessment of a project, country/regional program, strategy and policy by the entity engaged in the activity. Their main objective is to support performance, accountability and learning in the Bank. This evaluation occurs at a critical time when the institution is undergoing profound changes and is revisiting its strategic guidelines and operational processes. The evaluation’s main objectives are to: i) Assess SESP performance; ii) Identify and assess the enablers and barriers that affect SESP implementation and results; and iii) Distill lessons and good practices. The main SESP tools that have been used are progress reports, mid-term reviews and completion reports.

What did IDEV find?
The Bank’s SESP have many positive features such as strong standards and procedures underpinning their functioning, as well as a cogent articulation with the independent evaluation function carried out by IDEV. However, the main weaknesses of the SESP are in the application of the established procedures, standards, and norms. In addition, while the Bank has an independent evaluation policy, it does not have an integrated policy that covers both the independent evaluation function as well as self-evaluation. Also, the effectiveness of the SESP is constrained by the ratings methodology and structure, and the way it is applied to Project Completion Reports (PCRs).

Candor in self-evaluations, particularly in the Implementation Progress Reports, Annual Supervision Reports, and PCRs or Extended Supervision Reports (XSRs) was lacking due to, among other things, the inappropriate incentive structure. Also, the teams and project managers were motivated enough to help clients produce results by engaging in supervisory activities. However, most project managers and investment officers were overwhelmed, and the additional support needed to solve problems and help implement the SESP properly was lacking.

Compliance was low due to insufficient accountability mechanisms. Accountability processes paid little attention to the quality of project monitoring and closure. Implementation Progress Reports/Annual Supervision Reports and PCR/XSR were not fully considered as decision-making or knowledge-building tools but only seen as administrative requirements with limited accountability. Moreover, there was a lack of a consistent and harmonized framework to assess the performance of projects during their existence, from conception to independent evaluation. SESP products had a weak capacity to report on and address specific issues such as safeguards, gender, climate and fragility due to templates and formats that were not sufficiently differentiated and adapted to specific circumstances.

Completion reports on Country Strategy Papers/Country Portfolio Performance Reports and Regional Integration Strategy Papers were usually not validated by IDEV before being submitted to the Board. Furthermore, the implementation and incentive
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systems available did not prevent staff from ignoring the rules that were least convenient for them, and not generating the expected outputs.

**Learning**

Even though the SESP performance management and accountability aspects were weak, they overshadowed or even undermined learning objectives. In addition, apart from disagreement over the ratings between operational staff and IDEV, the lack of a single location for SESP products and information hampered learning. In sum, lessons identified were not institutionalized and documented to ensure their sustained and meaningful capitalization.

**What did IDEV recommend?**

1. Review the Bank’s results measurement and evaluation frameworks across the project cycle.

2. Review and revise, in close collaboration with IDEV, the PCR/XSR ratings methodology in use to improve the reliability of the rating system for all operations, and to better align Sovereign and Non-Sovereign Operations.

3. Enhance the accountability for SESP products by developing appropriate indicators and explicitly incorporating these indicators in the AfDB’s top-level corporate Key Performance Indicators, in Vice-Presidents’ and Directors’ performance agreements, and in staff performance discussions.

4. Review the sovereign and non-sovereign operations staffing levels for Monitoring and Evaluation and quality assurance activities in order to ensure that the self-evaluation function is appropriately staffed and resourced.

5. Enhance compliance with corporate self-evaluation reporting requirements by clarifying the roles, procedures, frequency and reporting requirements for supervision, implementation support, and completion.

6. Enhance learning through the SESP by improving the quality and accessibility of SESP products, and the understanding and acceptance of SESP as learning tools rather than accountability tools by the task managers.

**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.

**What did Management respond?**

Management welcomed IDEV’s report on the African Development Bank’s Self-Evaluation Systems and Processes. Overall, Management agreed with the recommendations, which are useful in further improving the processes and tools in place to monitor and manage operational quality and portfolio performance, while also sharpening both learning and accountability. Although 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, the management response to this report sets out actions to address the specific recommendations.

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