Civil Society in Evaluation

Volume 1 2021
From experience to knowledge...
From knowledge to action...
From action to impact

**About Independent Development Evaluation**

The mission of Independent Development Evaluation at the AfDB is to enhance the development effectiveness of the institution in its regional member countries through independent and instrumental evaluations and partnerships for sharing knowledge.

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Introduction

Civil society actors and organizations play a significant role in national and international development projects, but there is not much discussion or recognition of their involvement in the area of evaluation. From grassroots community associations to international non-governmental organizations, civil society actors already perform several vital functions in monitoring and evaluation, ranging from providing information to using evaluative knowledge to hold governments to account. However, they are not always involved to their full potential, and have only recently been started to be considered as important stakeholders to inform programs and strategies to achieve impactful results.
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Volume 3, 2021: Learning from Successes and Failures in Evaluation

Find eVALUation Matters at https://idev.afdb.org/page/evaluation-matters-magazine
When reflecting on the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in global and local development discourses, it is important to recall that the two main international development roadmaps for Africa, the United Nations’ Agenda 2030 and the African Union’s Agenda 2063, both define themselves as plans for action for people. They emphasize the need to follow an inclusive process in which Africa’s citizens would participate, from advocacy to design to implementation. They respectively envision a medium and a long-term development trajectory, adopting a people-centered approach. In this, CSOs are seen as essential for including local populations in the process of these agendas – as brokers between government and financial institutions, and the people they aim to engage.

There are several commonly understood benefits of involving civil society in development programs. Among these are obtaining support to better target beneficiaries and collect data due to CSOs’ local expertise and knowledge on the ground; managing the risk of failure; enhancing the ownership of populations; holding governments accountable; and improving results and impact, among others. Multilateral development institutions are increasingly involving and engaging civil society as key stakeholders and partners in achieving development goals, but their heterogeneous nature leads to their involvement being varied.
The AfDB has long recognized the importance of CSOs in pursuing its development work. The Bank issued its first Policy and Guidelines for Cooperation with CSOs in 1999, which set out the engagement to be undertaken with CSOs in the Bank’s development strategies and operations. The relationship between the Bank and CSOs was further strengthened when the Bank adopted the Civil Society Engagement Framework in 2012. The Bank also established a number of mechanisms to conduct this engagement, such as the Bank-CSO Committee and CSO Forum, and created a specific organizational unit with a dedicated team in 2016 to implement its vision. Today, CSOs are considered as a key partner to deliver the Bank’s High 5 operational priorities.

In 2020, IDEV conducted an evaluation of the Bank’s engagement with civil society to generate knowledge and recommendations to support the Bank’s work in this area. This evaluation aims to inform the design of a new Civil Society Engagement Strategy for the Bank. The Bank’s Board of Directors and Management welcomed the evaluation’s findings, lessons, and recommendations. The Management Response to the evaluation charts out the actions that the Bank will take to address areas for improvement in enhancing civil society engagement. I invite you to visit the evaluation’s webpage to download the report and explore lessons for application under similar contexts.

In this edition of Evaluation Matters, we reflect on the role of civil society in evaluation. A recent study on possible areas for enhanced collaboration between civil society and government in monitoring and evaluation, commissioned by Twende Mbele, the peer learning partnership of 6 African governments, found that CSOs and government can support national M&E systems in positive complementary relationships, for example by (i) building evaluation capacity of government staff who document processes in parliament and monitor budgets; (ii) expanding the role of CSOs in the national M&E system so they contribute their expertise in the reality of service delivery to government evaluations; and (iii) collaborating on the design and conduct of evaluations, as well as participating in steering committees and in the dissemination and utilization of results.

The edition delves deeper into these themes. We look at participation by CSOs in evaluation, examining the often competing priorities between civil society and implementing partners. We also explore how National Statistical Offices can support citizen-generated data by
CSOs to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs. Moving from the conceptual to a more practical perspective, we learn how the International Organization of La Francophonie partners with CSOs, demonstrating the role of CSOs in the evaluation and definition of public policies. Similarly, we hear from Oxfam, who are working with civil society partners to make sense of evaluation results and improving ownership and social accountability in Ethiopia and Niger. Finally, we present IDEV's recent evaluation of the AfDB's engagement with CSOs, exploring opportunities and challenges associated with the unique methodology of this evaluation which helped ensure that civil society views and opinions were collected and reflected in the evaluation. It also presents selected findings and concludes with some key lessons and recommendations.

With only ten years left to reach the SDGs, and the distance enlarged by the consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic, all players in the development space (including governments, development agencies, and civil society) will need to bundle their forces. The contribution that civil society can offer should be fully harnessed, including in global evaluation practices. We hope that this edition of eVALUation Matters contributes to important discussions on the role and the value of CSOs in evaluation and their other contributions towards achieving the SDGs.

Happy reading!

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About the Acting Evaluator General

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Before joining the AfDB in 2009, Karen was a Senior Policy Advisor at the Dutch Ministry of Finance (Treasury, Foreign Financial Relations Department). She holds degrees in Political Science, European Studies, and Economics.

Meaningful participation in evaluations is increasingly becoming difficult to implement. Implementing partners deal with conflicting priorities over combining performance-based accountability with budgetary and time constraints and in-depth consultation leading to community ownership.

The barrier in balancing priorities places Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in precarious positions as they often need to advocate for the community while also performing the role of being ‘participatory.’ It is not always possible to include every stakeholder due to feasibility, financial, and time availability. This article analyzes the definition of what ‘participatory enough’ entails. Further, it explores the barriers for CSOs in conducting participatory evaluations.
Key Messages

- There are different approaches in understanding participation in evaluation, i.e. through the role of civil society.
- Evaluators must consider values, who participates, and the feasibility of participating in evaluations when facilitated by civil society organizations.
- A self-reflective component is necessary for evaluations to be ‘participatory.’
- Evaluation scientific rigor can work together with ‘participatory practices.’ Including participation in evaluations can enhance rigor.

Introduction

In the international development community, donors, governments, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) underline the importance of participation and greater citizen voice. However, there is pressure to demonstrate effectiveness and impact and ‘management by results’ with a growing scarcity of funds. In addition, non-governmental actors usually undertake reporting and documentation of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes. CSOs are defined as all those that include non-market and non-state organizations (UNDP, 2013). They are regarded as the key actors in introducing and sustaining participation in the monitoring and evaluation process (intract, 2017).

There are many discussions about the need for participation in evaluations, but there is little about standards of the participatory process and the varied use of the term ‘participation. Most research around the term ‘participation’ is over 20 years old. While many assume the method is limited to obtaining qualitative data from the program participants’ opinions, practitioners and academics do not consider the power dynamics of evaluation design. CSOs are at the center of the debate as they simultaneously need to advocate for marginalized people and negotiate the process where program participants are involved. As a result, the political tension of balancing accountability and learning while maintaining budget and time constraints has dictated how the evaluation community defines participation.

This article explores the parameters of participation in evaluation: when is evaluation participatory ‘enough’? What is considered useful, and valuable for whom within communities? How do CSOs demonstrate ‘participation’, and what prevents evaluations from being participatory? This article provides evidence from mixed methods. Literature reviews different participation approaches and how these may affect CSOs’ contributions to the evaluation community, survey and nine interviews of CSOs, experts, and donors over five weeks. The authors sourced the Gender and Evaluation global community of close to 5000 members for further opinions.
Different approaches to Participation and Implications

Participation in evaluation attempts to actively involve key stakeholders such as communities in designing and implementing an evaluation. This approach's effectiveness depends on the relationship between key stakeholders: the policy-makers, service providers (often the CSOs), and communities. Historically, evidence suggests mixed results of participatory processes. Such approaches improve information flow and create new delivery mechanisms but critics assert that participation does not lead to empowerment as it does not challenge centralized decision-making and resource allocation (Mubita, et al., 2017). A Zambian case study (Mubita, et al., 2017) demonstrates participation techniques can often conceal traditional relationships of power. This means participation must be politically contextual and this can place CSOs at risk as they balance the donor's objectives while motivating community members to participate.

Analyzing different participation frameworks can give us insight into how to remove the burden on CSOs. Related literature most often references Arstein's ladder, which looks at participation from the perspective of recipients ranging from citizen control at the top to tokenism with the lowest category of non-participation of the participants. Similarly, the Utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) approach is based on the principle that an evaluation should be judged on its usefulness to its intended users. However, the methodology discusses ‘involvement,’ not explicitly about the ‘participatory’ aspect of evaluation (Patton, 2008). The ownership narrative suggests that participants are in the best position to judge how the intervention has affected their lives. In turn, they may be able to identify appropriate questions and causal pathways and outcomes to examine (Levine & Griñó, 2015).

However, White (1996) diverges from the hierarchy and adapts the definitions of participation based on recipients' interests: Nominal, Instrumental, Representative, and Transformative (See Table 1 for definitions).

Looking at White’s typology, collecting data from community members can be an instrumental or representative form of participation. At times, some stakeholders may only want a nominal presence in the evaluation such as senior leaders present for the important meetings. Transformational participation requires ways for the community to have a decision and acting power for themselves. Removing the hierarchy ensures that all participants have different but equitable presence during the entire evaluation cycle.

White’s typology of participation is useful to have explicit discussions with different stakeholders. A Transformational

Fetterman et al. (2017) highlight difference among collaborative, participatory, and empowerment approaches to evaluation in terms of evaluators’ role and control of stakeholders. These frameworks are all similar in rating one element upon a one-dimensional gradient.
form of participation requires stakeholder's involvement in the decision and actions of evaluations. While there are many positives in designing an evaluation that engages stakeholders, evaluators must clarify:

- What value does this evaluation serve?
- Whose participation matters the most and when?
- What form of participation is feasible concerning resources?

To explore these questions, here are three key tensions we must be considerate of:

Table 1: Types of participation by program participants (White, 1996, cited in Cornwall, 2008 and Guijt, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>What participation means to the implementing agency</th>
<th>What participation means for those on the receiving end</th>
<th>What participation is for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal</td>
<td>Legitimation: to show they are doing something</td>
<td>Inclusion: to retain some access to potential benefits</td>
<td>Display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Efficiency: to limit funders’ input, draw on community contribution and make projects more cost-effective</td>
<td>Cost: time spent on project-related labor and other activities</td>
<td>As a means to achieve cost-effectiveness and create local facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Sustainability: to avoid creating dependency</td>
<td>Leverage: to influence the shape of the project and its management</td>
<td>To give people a voice in determining their own development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>Empowerment: to enable people to make their own decisions, work out what to do, and take action</td>
<td>Empowerment: to enable people to decide and act for themselves</td>
<td>As a means and an end/a continuing dynamic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation commissioners predominantly respond to the demands of donor practices (Intrac, 2017). Due to the high reliance on being donor-focused and analyzing the degree to which results donor-values are achieved, these types of evaluations pay attention to some stakeholders' needs (primarily donors and external actors) and may miss other critical perspectives. Evaluators interviewed also mentioned that they need to involve donors throughout the process to use findings, which creates heavy communication burdens. One example cited by CSO interviews reported having their social capital damaged when the evaluation expectations were donor-driven. The project prioritized information for the international community more than the implementation. There was a lack of communication from the evaluation team to the local CSO regarding evaluation indicators. The community became deeply unsatisfied with the process. In the end, the umbrella CSO raised funds for a second more inclusive evaluation using alternative methods of inquiry. This allowed the local CSO staff and communities to give their insights on the program but provided a positive experience as it democratized learning across all stakeholders.

Who is the data provider/data extractor?

The main issue of participation in evaluation is knowing who the evaluation serves. Half of the CSO interviewees conducted mentioned collecting data but feeling unsure about the information's purpose or goal. Stakeholders were sometimes simply ‘data providers’, while some CSOs felt cornered to be the ‘data extractors’ according to one respondent.
Learning vs. accountability

Evaluators often have to navigate a thin line between learning and accountability when promoting the evaluation among the program team and reporting to the donors. In these instances, when accountability is downward and CSOs are answerable to the donor(s), there is often a focus on compliance-checking and financial accountability, making it difficult to combine learning and accountability. The tension between learning and accountability is not necessary and is avoidable. Accountability traditionally has been used to serve financial responsibilities, however, it can also be used for oneself (Guijt, 2010). To take responsibility and accountability for oneself allows the self to learn and to grow. This changes the focus of the evaluation from a downward accountability mechanism into a learning exercise. An evaluation that serves the community in a learning process requires a different procedure from those that focus on upward accountability (Tsui, J., et al., 2014). Evaluations that focus on the process have a stronger possibility of fostering ownership within the community and can involve the necessary stakeholders for the findings' greatest use.

Therefore, it may be more useful to separate the accountability and learning function if the donors need to prioritize financial compliance. Focusing on learning or self-accountability means giving CSOs the autonomy to use the evaluation budget in ways that serve their own goals. Separating financial compliance from learning may allow the evaluation community to be more honest about their intentions and goals. One CSO participant interviewed discussed a recent project that took place over three years. During this period, the project consisted of a one-year baseline, one year to implement a policy-influencing project, and one-year for the end line evaluation. The heavy emphasis on evaluation represented a greater emphasis on gathering data for external stakeholders rather than internal growth.

Definition of rigor

Participatory methods are best used for exploring complex ideas where the interconnection between individuals is prioritized. Participation in evaluations focuses on the self-reflective exercises of what worked in this context. This leads to some form of interpretation, and there may be moments of differing views and contestation (Cartwright, 2019). Meanwhile, rigor (as defined by Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs)) looks to make information generalizable and usable for all contexts, which only allows for a narrow set of conclusions (Cartwright, 2019). Therefore, it can be difficult to reconcile the competing demands of scientific rigor and participation.

While not mutually exclusive, there is space for internal learning and reflection, and external validity can also be included. Literature (Guijt, 2014., Leykum, et al., 2009) suggests analyzing RCTs using a cyclical reflection exercise, not currently standard practice. The reflective exercise brings the central actor into the decision-making role, increasing the rigor as it includes a greater number of perspectives. The reflective practice also forces the evaluations to be more explicit about any potential bias.

An example of a self-reflective exercise is included in the emerging trend ‘Trust-based Philanthropy’ (Citi Foundation, 2020). It focuses on making internal changes within grant-making organizations and how they work with local CSOs through M&E systems. The method revolves around learning and outcomes determined by grantees. Grant-making organizations build a trusting relationship with the grantees to improve their community's lives by focusing on general operating support and capacity building funding with less focus on financial accountability.

Tools to ensure representatives from CSOs can include outcome harvesting as there are no preconceived notions of outcomes or goals. Outcomes Harvesting begins with results and traces back causality in a
collaborative process between donor and grantee. This may be effective for monitoring, evaluating, and learning in a reflective way.

Lastly, self-measurement practices in communities are gaining popularity and are known to add a rigorous form of reflective data. For example, Constellation (Nanda, 2019) facilitates a process where the communities are involved in the design, implementation and measurement of the issue. Through self-measurement practices, the communities are motivated to generate their own or use existing data to make decisions and take actions. With such a process, communities develop an evaluative perspective of the actions they perform together, learning as they take stock and appreciate what they are doing: an approach that involves intuitive or unconscious learning, but one that also generates change.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidence demonstrates that it is possible to include a high degree of participation in rigorous evaluations. Evaluators must consider who the evaluation serves, whose participation matters the most, and mitigate constraints. Self-reflective processes can add to rigor if done properly. To ensure truly participatory evaluations, the following recommendations should be followed:

1. **Be explicit on the type of participatory evaluation you are practicing.** From White’s typologies, there are four types (Nominal, Instrumental, Representative, Transformative).

2. **Build-in self-reflective practices.** When organizations intend to learn, the evaluation centers on the participants. Focus on the actor rather than the external participant. Find ways to separate learning evaluations from those that focus on compliance and accountability.

3. **Acknowledge the power imbalance.** As reflective evaluation practitioners, being explicit with the power imbalance between evaluators and stakeholders will only help to increase the rigor.

4. **Offer strength-based approaches.** Strength-based approaches suggest that communities have the potential to deal with their issues. In believing in the community’s potential, we also empower them to track their progress.

5. **Encourage capacity-building.** Capacity building is a form of exchange that encourages participation and the collaborative effort between donors and grantees to be more effective in monitoring and evaluation.
References


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Citizen-generated data (CGD) has a high potential to monitor and drive progress on a country’s development, including towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as to help amplify citizens’ voices and their perspectives on development. However, there are limitations in CGD and challenges for its use. This article argues that National Statistical Offices can support and guide citizen-generated data initiatives to comply with statistical quality standards and improve their usefulness.
Karen Bett, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

Key Messages

- Official statistics have traditionally been relied upon in measuring progress against commitments. However, with advances in technology, alternative data sources such as citizen-generated data (CGD) have become increasingly relevant to help close the data gap.

- Despite its potential, CGD is perceived to lack credibility due to its limitations of low coverage and the number of sufficient initiatives to represent a population or area of interest.

- With the stewardship of National Statistical Offices (NSOs), civil society can conduct citizen-generated data initiatives that comply with statistical quality standards similar to those used by NSOs.

- Producing guidelines that provide a “translation” of statistical concepts, principles, and processes into everyday language will enable civil society organizations to produce high-quality data that complies with quality standards.

- Beyond guidelines, more investment efforts should be targeted towards strengthening CGD.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Agenda 2030), adopted by all United Nations Members States in 2015, reflects a unique global consensus and commitment to address the world’s most acute and pressing development challenges to leave no one behind. With less than ten years to go to 2030, the need to accelerate progress could not be more urgent than now. To accelerate progress, quality data needs to be available to guide informed decisions on implementing and reviewing the 2030 Agenda.

The UN Secretary-General’s Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report for 2019 highlights that many national statistical systems worldwide face serious challenges in having the right amount and quality of data to measure progress. The result: accurate and timely information about the lives of people is unknown. Numerous groups and individuals remain “invisible,” and many development challenges are still poorly understood.

New data sources and technologies for data collection and the integration of various data sources such as citizen-generated data and big data need to be continually explored to generate necessary quality data. This requires partnerships across governments, civil society, the private sector, and academia.

Citizen-generated data (CGD) has a high potential to monitor and drive progress on a country’s development, including towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Citizen-generated data is defined as data that people or their organizations produce to monitor, demand directly, or drive change on issues that affect them. This can be produced through crowdsourcing mechanisms or citizen reporting initiatives, often organized and managed by civil society groups (Wilson, Christopher and Zara Rahman).
It is grounded in the local context - including in geographies and demographics that are hard to reach. Therefore, one of its purposes is to help amplify citizens’ voices and their perspectives on development. It is actively given by citizens, providing direct representations of their views and an alternative to governments or international institutions' datasets. As such, CGD allows governments to innovate ways to engage their citizens and improve evidence-based decision-making. Importantly, CGD provides a great opportunity to complement official statistics produced by National Statistical Offices and, therefore, a useful data source for measuring the SDGs. Table 1 documents the various ways that CGD helps to achieve the SDGs.

Despite its potential, the challenges and limitations of citizen-generated data have also been documented. These include the low coverage that these initiatives have, both from a geographical distribution and the number of sufficient initiatives to represent a population or area of interest. It is also difficult to compare CGD collected by different actors and in multiple countries, often collected according to different methodologies, strategic priorities, and cultural and political contexts. All of the above have contributed to perceptions that citizen-generated data often lack credibility. As a result, governments are less likely to use or integrate it into their datasets (GPSDD, 2017).

As data stewards, the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) can support and guide citizen-generated data initiatives to comply with statistical quality standards. For example, the Philippines Statistics Agency (PSA) has developed a case study on CGD’s potentials and features in the country and a quality assurance framework to guide civil society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation to SDGs</th>
<th>CGD can play the following roles</th>
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| Citizenship: Creating new relationships and public spaces | - Be a venue for local development and education strategies.  
- Provide the frame for outreach and engagement with special interest communities.  
- Enhance and innovate governments’ engagement strategies with citizens.  
- Provide localized statistics; CGD is detailed because citizens can be more knowledgeable on the issues surrounding them. |
| Monitoring: Informing, expanding, and improving SDG monitoring | - Produce data in hard-to-reach regions.  
- Identify patterns hidden behind averages.  
- Improve the capacity of states to detect issues.  
- Cross-verify government data with CGD and vice versa.  
For example: Since 1999, Afrobarometer has conducted public opinion surveys on democracy, governance, the economy, and society in more than 30 countries on the continent and repeated on a regular cycle. |
| Implementation: Informing public policy goals and community-driven problem solving | - Provide baseline data for research and test assumptions.  
- Enable planning, strategy development, and resource allocation.  
- Monitor performance of public facilities.  
- Identify root causes around problems.  
For example, CGD has proven useful during responses to natural disasters, such as the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal. Volunteers for the Humanitarian Open Street Maps Team provided rescuers with much-needed local data. |

organizations (CSO) as they are key facilitators of CGD (Paris 21, 2020). They are in close touch with citizens and can work with them to collect and use CGD. CSOs need clear and easy-to-understand guidance on how to collect and process data in a way that conforms with the standards defined by NSOs. This can help address the issue of credibility, methodological variability of citizen generated data and could allow governments to use them better.

Kenya has been a top advocate of the 2030 Agenda and has reported its progress towards SDGs achievement in a Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2017 and 2020. The SDGs are systematically mainstreamed in the third Medium Term Plan (MTP III 2018–2022) and in Vision 2030, a development blueprint developed by the Kenyan government to turn the country into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030.

The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (Global Partnership), with support from the German development agency, GIZ, has developed guidelines that enable non-state actors to produce citizen-generated data that fulfills government quality standards in Kenya. These guidelines provide a “translation” of statistical concepts, principles, and processes into everyday language to enable civil society organizations to produce high-quality data that complies with quality standards defined by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. The guidelines are now available on the Global Partnership website.

Looking forward, there are increasing calls for more and better data in many African countries on the SDGs and national reporting. Developing and adhering to guidelines that enable non-state actors to produce citizen-generated data that fulfills government quality standards will play an important role in positioning CGD as good quality and fit for purpose.

Beyond guidelines, it is important to strengthen collaboration to enable sharing of lessons; within and across countries, among civil society, and National Statistical Offices. Strengthening CGD calls for increased investments to strengthen data capacity within civil society. Furthermore, investments should target strengthening National Statistical Offices to support CGD. This will enable them to spearhead activities that institutionalize CGD, such as conducting data gaps assessments and developing quality criteria to assess and accept CGD for reporting and decision-making.
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References


Making%20Use%20of%20Citizen-Generated%20Data%20-%20Data4SDGs%20Toolbox%20Module.pdf

Enhancing collaboration to strengthen implementation and use of government M&E systems.

In many African countries, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in improving the use of evidence – from evaluations at the national and subnational levels, to data collection and research. Compared to governments, CSOs have a longer history of using evaluations for strengthening their programmes. However, their involvement, formally or informally, in a country’s national evaluation system varies. The changing socio-economic and socio-political history of each country influences the roles that CSOs have and continue to play. The constituencies of civil society are broad and hence their agendas for use of M&E and collaboration with government are varied.

Recognising the role CSOs play in promoting greater accountability in governments, Twende Mbele commissioned a study to identify possible areas for enhanced collaboration between civil society and government in M&E systems. We found that CSOs and government can support national M&E systems in positive complementary relationships. Examples include:

- building evaluation capacity of government staff documenting processes in parliament (SA’s Parliamentary Monitoring Group) and monitoring budgets;
- expanding the role of CSOs in the national M&E so they contribute their expertise in service delivery reality to government evaluations;
- collaborate on designing and undertaking evaluations, as well as participating in steering committees and in the dissemination and utilisation of results. There is considerable scope for collaboration in M&E between African governments and civil society but these opportunities are not optimally taken advantage of; often as a result of mutual suspicion.

To ameliorate this, Twende Mbele – in partnership with CLEAR AA – have run training workshops to devise a Theory of Change for an ideal situation of government/CSO collaboration, and are currently undertaking two projects:

1. Work in Ghana is looking at how CSOs can foster a collaborative platform in the water and sanitation sector, starting with urban sewerage indicators.
2. In Uganda, the health sector is coming together with government to co-create a sector-wide evaluation agenda.
From providers to partners: a new paradigm for the role of civil society in the evaluation process

This article presents an approach adopted by the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), outlining its partnership with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the promotion of the French language and Francophone cultures. It demonstrates the role of civil society and its benefit in the evaluation and definition of public policies, as well as the implementation of projects. The author argues that the lack of involvement by these actors in policy evaluations is often linked to the fragility of the partnership between public authorities and CSOs. She calls for a paradigm shift that could lead to the structuring, development and influence of a neutral, independent and non-profit civil society.
Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are one mechanism of intervention for the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF). However, the understanding of "civil society" may have very different meanings and realities. The OIF recognizes the following entities as CSOs: non-governmental organization (NGOs), foundations, cooperatives, professional associations, social partners, and economic actors who have a limited profit goal (such as social enterprises).

As a result, the OIF has opted for a threefold approach in its partnership with CSOs. CSOs are, first of all, beneficiaries of actions within missions of the Francophonie. This entails the promotion of the French language and Francophone cultures, support for peace and democracy, support for education, youth, citizenship and sport as well as issues relating to human, economic and sustainable development. The OIF also aims to promote the structuring, development and influence of French-speaking civil society as a whole.

This mobilization is put in place through training, networking and support activities in the implementation of projects by French-speaking CSOs. Likewise, CSOs are considered, within the Francophonie, as strategic partners. The OIF has therefore set up an accreditation system for INGOs/NGOs, which are privileged partners of the organization and its member states and governments. They thus benefit from a permanent forum for dialogue with other accredited CSOs, which promotes their networking, structuring and development within the French-speaking world. Subsequently, the 127 INGOs and NGOs currently accredited to OIF are able, via the Conference of International NGOs (COING), to be involved in strategic discussions and activities, which contribute to the construction of tomorrow's Francophonie.

CSOs are increasingly seen as partners in the definition, development and implementation phases of public policies and projects. Indeed, faced with the complexity of current world challenges, states, governments and even intergovernmental organizations are calling for public policies or multi-actor projects to cover all facets of the same...
issue. As part of a study carried out in 2019 aimed at measuring the overall state of Francophone civil society, the OIF highlighted that globally, within the Francophone arena, “interviewed CSOs perceive that their role is progressing in their countries. This is particularly noticeable with regard to the involvement of civil society in the definition of public policies and in the advancement of national CSO advocacy”.

None the less, although CSOs contribute to the formulation and implementation of public policies and development projects, they are still often absent during the evaluation phase. According to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC / OECD), evaluation makes it possible to “bring an systematic and objective appreciation of [public policy] or a completed or ongoing project, a program or a set of actions, design, implementation and results. It is a question of determining the relevance of the objectives and their degree of achievement, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability”. Operationally, the OIF sees the evaluation process as a continuous process of qualitative and quantitative assessment occurring during the different phases of the implementation of a public policy or a project.

Despite this, it is clear that CSOs remain little involved in the evaluation of results and outcomes of public policies and projects that they may have helped to develop or implement. As direct or indirect beneficiaries of all public policies and / or development projects, CSOs could be more systematically tapped into to better understand the relevance, results and outcomes of public strategies and deployed actions deployed. As representative organizations of citizens, CSOs could also be involved as stakeholders in the evaluation processes by participating, for example, in the definition of terms of reference, the conduct of an evaluation and in the preparation of final reports.

So why then are CSOs still so little integrated into these essential stages, which are paramount for the success of a public policy or project? To what extent is the absence of CSOs in these processes undermining both the credibility of the evaluation, the effectiveness of the projects carried out as well as the reality of the long-awaited civil society / donor partnership?

I. A fragile public-civil society partnership limits their contribution to the evaluation of public policies and implemented projects.

In a survey conducted by the Institut français d’opinion publique, or IFOP, from February 8 to 12, 2018, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) questioned the French as to their perception of civil society and its role. While civil society remains a notion that is not precisely defined for a large part of our fellow citizens, a large majority of them (86%) consider that they must be heard by public authorities and play a leading role in the democratic balance. Yet 77% consider that [civil society] is insufficiently listened to ...

This observation can be partly explained by the fact that the relationship between public authorities and CSOs has evolved in a paradoxical manner over several decades. Many CSOs came into being as a reaction to the failings and / or inadequacies of public policies with many immediately positioning themselves as opponents of the very public authorities they may need to work with. In addition, over the years, some of these entities have gradually become politicized, de facto evading the principles that govern the nature of CSOs: neutrality, independence and non-profitability. This permeability between the political and civil defense arena has reinforced the mistrust of public authorities towards civil society, leading to assimilate CSOs with political opposition.
Indeed, many public authorities have long held a reluctance to grant a role to CSOs. A study commissioned by the OIF in 2019 looking at the role of French-speaking civil society identifies three major contexts in which civil societies operate and which determine their capacities for action: “open” contexts, “semi-open”, and “closed”. In this regard, it was noted that, in the French-speaking world, there is, in a certain number of countries, a reduction in the space for civil society, which is demonstrated by a decline in dialogue between civil society and public authorities - and even a tightening of regulatory framework vis-à-vis civil society. In these contexts, we speak of an CSO counter-revolution, which first affects the most sensitive organizations (especially human rights organizations).

In this context, it would therefore seem difficult to make CSOs partners in the evaluation of public policies and projects, not only by public authorities but by technical and financial partners as well. Indeed, to allow civil society the capacity to assess the relevance of activities, it is necessary to not only benefit from mutual trust and understanding, but also from mechanisms favoring the structuring of long-term partnerships between civil society, public authorities and, technical or financial partners. This desire for partnership, which de facto excludes any tendency to engage civil society by authorities or the desire to destabilize political authorities by CSOs, is the sine qua non condition for allowing civil society to play its role of citizen watchdog; a pledge of credibility, relevance and impact of public policies and / or implemented projects.

In fact, the participation of CSOs in the evaluation process is likely to encourage a greater uptake on the part of a community as relates to public policies and projects. Although CSOs are not the only entities who can encourage an appreciation of the benefits of a project by the community as a whole, they are nevertheless rooted in these communities and can thus, legitimately, share and reflect the overall benefit, as well as results, from a public program.

CSOs are also able to identify and respond to blind spots that may appear during the evaluation process. In all evaluation processes, even the most inclusive and complete, there can be imperfections and/or oversights made to the terms of reference or expected results of a public policy or implemented project. This may not be intentional or due to a lack of consideration on a certain number of possible outcomes, but highlight how the involvement of CSOs during this phase constitute a particularly useful mechanism to ensure programs and final analysis benefit not only beneficiaries and stakeholders but also third parties that may be impacted in one way or another.

II. The participation of civil society organizations strengthens the credibility of an evaluation process.

The involvement CSOs in the evaluation of public policies and / or projects (as beneficiaries and as stakeholders) considerably increases the quality and relevance of the evaluation process. This participation promotes the integration of a fully transversal vision throughout a policy or process. While international cooperation projects become more and more sophisticated and embrace increasingly complex and complementary dimensions of the same issue, an evaluation carried out by solely external consultants in conjunction with public authorities / technical partners is not more sufficient.

III. Involving civil society organizations in evaluation: putting in place a guarantee for the quality of public policies and development projects.

The involvement and engagement of CSOs in evaluation processes can bring many advantages, in terms of the projects themselves as well as lending to the credibility of the process itself.
First of all, a coordinated approach can enrich the quality of public policies and/or development projects. While the expected results of a development action should be defined in its formative phase, the involvement of CSOs in the evaluation process must also be considered further upstream in the project. It therefore becomes essential to anticipate the role and missions of CSOs in developing public policy or projects. By involving CSOs in the evaluation process from the project design phase onwards, these entities are no longer de facto operators and/or implementation providers but real partners throughout the implementation process. Such a partnership is likely to increase the quality, relevance and impacts of a public policy or project as the CSOs can contribute voluntarily to reflections and can share their experiences and expertise in the field in addition to being able to identify possible risks. They then can share tools and practices that will produce the best results. Making civil society an actor in the evaluation process helps to broaden the prism of reflection around an envisaged approach and thus increase its relevance, impact and influence in the field.

In addition to enriching a project or public policy, the involvement of CSOs in the evaluation process also allows the initiator to obtain a more complete and transversal view of the relevance of the project as it is carried, it also can contribute to its sustainability. The result is, in fact, a greater adequacy in actions with needs expressed in the field as well as a greater consideration of the expectations expressed by citizens. In such a context, the public policy or project is more likely to be updated, reinforced and used again in new implementation phases.

Involving CSOs in the definition, implementation and evaluation of a public policy or project also presents opportunities at the partnership level. Although most often associated with the implementation of projects as providers/operators than as real partners, engaging civil society actors early will develop a feeling of greater belonging to public policies or projects. It can also ensure a more trusting relationship with public authorities or technical and financial partners. In this way, CSOs not only become allies of implemented projects but also reliable partners in the feedback of data, the identification of obstacles and the promotion of actors behind the projects.

IV. An involvement that contributes to the structuring, development and influence of a neutral and independent civil society.

The development, organization and influence of an independent, neutral and non-profit civil society is a marker of healthy development as it takes into consideration the general interest and needs within a society. Involving CSOs in the evaluation of public policies and development projects naturally leads to integrating, on a more regular basis, the needs expressed by these entities and to making them beneficiaries of the actions. As a result, such an approach contributes both to the constriction and development of these entities not just for the purpose of development but also in meeting the needs of the general public.

The involvement of CSOs in the evaluation process is also a venue for networking organizations amongst themselves. This can not only create additional impact and beneficial synergies in the implementation of public policies or actions but can also weave a solid associative fabric which can mobilize collectively. Such an approach promotes mutual knowledge and fosters further development between civil society actors, all to the benefit of the policy or project. This collective mobilization of CSOs brings another virtue: that of demonstrating to states, governments and technical or financial partners the importance of working in partnership with CSOs. It can demonstrate the
credibility and effectiveness of these structures as well as their expertise in priority areas.

In conclusion, it is unfortunate that the engagement of CSOs in the evaluation of public policies and projects is limited by the very nature of their relationship with national public authorities. Reciprocal mistrust drastically limits the potential of a partnership relationship with civil society, who can and should be a stakeholder in public policies and projects - whether during their development, implementation or even in evaluation. For several years now, an increasingly prominent trend has emerged encouraging the engagement of CSOs in the preparatory steps and implementation of actions in the field, yet still only too rarely materializes in the full participation of these organizations. This situation is at the origin of a three negative impacts: 1. The partnership relationship between civil society and public authorities is built too slowly; 2. The evaluations carried out are not sufficiently inclusive; 3. Civil society finds it difficult to insert itself and to see its proper role recognized within societies.

However, for any nation, making civil society a partner in the development, implementation and evaluation of its public policies and projects constitutes a particularly effective avenue for development; both in increasing the quality of actions as well as strengthening the development of civil society. These combined can ensure a better match between policies or programs deployed in the field and the needs expressed by citizens.
The Conference of INGOs of La Francophonie:

At the heart of its action with civil society, the International Organisation of La Francophonie OIF relies on the Conference of INGOs of La Francophonie (COING). In 2020, 127 International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) were accredited by the OIF. The accreditation, instituted by the Francophonie Charter, makes it possible to: 1. Increase the visibility of civil society within Francophonie authorities; 2. Build capacities of accredited INGOs / NGOs; and 3. Foster their association and involvement in actions and programs carried out in French-speaking countries.

The mandate of the COING enables it to: 1. Promote the major role of civil society within French-speaking societies; 2. Participate, via the President of the COING, in various entities such as the Commission for Cooperation and Programming, the Permanent Council of the Francophonie, and the Ministerial Conference of the Francophonie; 3. Transmit statements to the authorities of the Francophonie; and 4. Involve its members in the definition, management and evaluation of certain activities carried out by the OIF. The COING has an action plan covering its five thematic committees as well as some operational actions to be carried out over a period of two years.

Marie Fall is the President of the Conference of INGOs of La Francophonie.
Making sense of evaluation results with civil society partners is a growing practice in Oxfam Novib’s formative and evaluative research. Participatory reflection sessions create meaningful opportunities for civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to take ownership of evaluation findings and to ensure a more nuanced understanding of them. These reflection sessions also constitute an important step towards greater social accountability whereby the people and communities Oxfam works with engage with the findings to support the interpretation of results and assess how to apply them in their decision making.
Key Messages

- **Evaluators are accountable to the people**: Oxfam Novib and partner organizations work with, both within projects and in evaluations themselves.

- **Social accountability in evaluation can be achieved**: when citizens and civil society have the tools to hold evaluators accountable. Their most powerful tool is the experiential knowledge of the context in which the outcomes and results of evaluations are situated.

- **Participatory reflection sessions**: where evaluators work with civil society, NGOs, and community stakeholders to take ownership of the evaluation findings and ensure a more nuanced understanding of them, are a critical tool for building greater social accountability.

- **The development and humanitarian sector should do more**: to involve partners, including communities, in the design, implementation, as well as evaluation of programs.

- **Participatory reflection sessions are an imperfect but pragmatic tool**: for building greater social accountability.

Introduction

Few evaluators in the development and humanitarian fields would disagree that people who participate in an evaluation should benefit from the knowledge it generates. To do so, they need to know the outcomes of an evaluation and what will be done with those results. However, in practice, people and communities who participate in evaluations are rarely informed about their outcomes. Few evaluators bring their results back to the people and communities where the data came from in the first place. Participatory reflection sessions on evaluation findings and outcomes are one tool Oxfam has used to bring evaluation findings and outcomes back to the people and communities we work with. This article explores the possibilities, as well as the limits, of these sessions, through follow-up interviews with recent participants.

We contend that evaluators are accountable to the people and communities organizations work with, both within projects and in evaluations themselves. **Social accountability** in evaluation can be achieved when citizens and civil society have tools to hold evaluators accountable for their evaluations. The most basic of these tools is knowledge of the outcomes and results of evaluations. One method for sharing this knowledge is through participatory reflection sessions, where evaluators work with civil society organizations (CSOs), partner organizations, and people we work with in programs themselves to make sense of evaluation results and the knowledge the evaluation generates is fed back into the communities where it belongs. Thereby, session participants...
take ownership of the evaluation findings and further cascade those results to others in the communities they live and work.

In this article, we briefly retrace the evolution of the concept of accountability in an evaluation and argue that evaluators are accountable to the people and communities that not only participate in programs or projects, but also in evaluations. We introduce the concept of participatory reflection sessions as used by Oxfam and describe recent examples of sessions held in Ethiopia and Niger. Drawing on interviews with reflection session participants, we find that these reflection sessions have contributed to greater social accountability, although much more remains to be done. We conclude with recommendations about deepening and broadening the involvement of CSOs, NGOs, and people and communities we work with in future reflection sessions and possibilities for further strengthening social accountability in evaluation work.

Accountable to whom?

Who are evaluators in the development and humanitarian sector accountable to? Historically, program evaluation has focused on providing accountability to policymakers, donors, and funders to show that resources invested in programs are achieving their intended purposes (Madaus and Stufflebeam, 2000). As classical monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has evolved into “monitoring, evaluation and learning” (MEL) or even “monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning” (MEAL) (Madaus and Stufflebeam, 2000), notions of accountability have expanded along with the acronyms. Many organizations in the development and humanitarian sector have committed themselves to being accountable not only to donors but also to their employees, supporters, and sometimes also the people and communities they work with. This is sometimes referred to as “downward accountability,” in contrast to “upward accountability” towards funders (Ebrahim, 2010). We consciously avoid using these terms ourselves so as not to legitimize the hierarchical power relationships they evoke. Accountability at its root is about responsibility: being accountable means being held responsible for what you do (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). We understand social accountability broadly to mean engagement on the part of citizens and civil society to hold those in positions of power responsible for their actions and obligations (Houtzager and Joshi, 2008).

To realize social accountability in practice, we must bring evaluation results and findings back to the communities that informed evaluations, thereby providing the tools those communities need to hold us accountable for our work. As evaluator and researcher Christian Kashurha has pointed out in an influential blog post, “the communities in which we carry out research projects must be informed of our findings; they must be given a stake in the research results. Otherwise, what is the point of research?” (2019). But this is rarely done in practice. When not required by donors, going back to people and communities that participated in evaluations can be difficult to prioritize and plan for, even more so to budget for. The task may be further complicated by language barriers, limited literacy and numeracy, long distances to cover, and other challenges. As a result, many evaluators stop at posting their evaluation reports online. However, this leaves evaluation findings well out of the reach of many. To achieve social accountability, we must do more.

Making sense of evaluation results with key stakeholders

Oxfam engages all stakeholders in its programs in participatory reflection sessions to make sense of formative and evaluative research results. Partner
CSOs and project participants are key stakeholders we seek to involve.

Participatory reflection sessions have three principal goals. First, they provide an opportunity for different people involved in the program to verify and validate findings. This enables more nuanced and better-grounded conclusions. Second, they build ownership of the results among stakeholders and increase the likelihood that results will be used in programs. Third, they help close the social accountability gap by sharing findings with the people who provided the data. Ideally, these stakeholders share what they have learned with others in the communities where they live and work, cascading the information to those who might not access it otherwise.

The degree to which these goals are met varies from project to project. Some evaluations are fully participatory and people-led, while others may involve a smaller and narrower group of participants. Sessions may be in-person, online, or a blend of the two and can range from shorter sessions focused on top-line findings that may run as little as a few hours to as long as three days. This article highlights two participatory reflection sessions that took different forms with different types of stakeholder engagement (see Table 1 an overview).

The first example is from Ethiopia, a country where Oxfam implements its Empower Youth for Work (EYW) program. EYW is a five-year program funded by the IKEA Foundation that focuses on enabling young women and men in rural areas affected by climate change to seek and obtain economic independence. We will highlight two reflection sessions as part of the EYW program in Ethiopia. The first was a participatory group analysis of qualitative research into the factors that contribute to business start-ups' success, led by young men and women. The second was a reflection on the results of a quantitative impact evaluation conducted halfway through the program. Young people themselves were at the center of both these sessions.
Our second example comes from the program “Towards a worldwide influencing network,” led by a strategic partnership (SP) between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oxfam Novib, and the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO). In 2019, Oxfam completed a quantitative impact evaluation that tracked changes in citizen activism on fiscal justice in Niger, one of the program countries. Oxfam organized a half-day reflection session with program staff and representatives of two partners in Niger to interpret the findings and formulate conclusions and recommendations.

These two very different examples illustrate how a participatory reflection workshop can be organized. We note that organizing effective reflection sessions poses some important dilemmas. Decisions about the venue (capital city or rural area?), format (in-person, online or blended? Unilingual or with simultaneous translation?), content, and tone influence who will attend and participate actively. Decisions about which findings to share with which audiences need careful consideration. Some evaluation findings may be susceptible in a given context. Imagine an evaluation that finds that most people condone a harmful cultural practice like female genital mutilation or child marriage, or a finding that draws unwanted attention to partner organizations in a context of shrinking civic space. In these cases, evaluators must strike a careful balance between a commitment to transparency and disclosure and the imperative of doing no harm through the dissemination of sensitive findings or those that could be easily misconstrued.

Have reflection sessions fostered greater social accountability?

Both Ethiopia and Niger experiences provided valuable insights into the potential and limits of participatory reflection sessions as a tool for greater social accountability. Our sample included two participants in Niger and eight participants in Ethiopia. Seven interviewees were staff members of partner organizations working with Oxfam in these countries and one was an Oxfam staff-member. Two were young people participating in the EYW program in Ethiopia. Interviewees were asked to provide brief written responses on-line to a short set of questions.

Table 1: Snapshot of two participatory reflection sessions conducted by Oxfam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection session participants</th>
<th>GOALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verifying and validating research findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYW Ethiopia</td>
<td>Shared analysis of part of the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Shared interpretation of findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth group members</td>
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<td>Youth enumerators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oxfam staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Government institutions (working on youth empowerment)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SP Niger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Shared interpretation of findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oxfam staff</td>
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<td>Partner staff</td>
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</tbody>
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38
First, we asked what participants felt they learned from the reflection sessions they attended and how they used the results. All interviewees reported taking away important learnings from the reflection sessions they attended, ranging from the top-line findings, to the program implications of these results, to a better appreciation of the steps of an evaluation process. Most interviewees reported that they put these results to use in their work after the reflection session, including in influencing work, program adaptation, and fund-raising.

We also asked whether reflection session participants shared evaluation findings with others and with whom. One interviewee in Niger reported disseminating key results to CSO partners via social media and in-person meetings. Among the recipients were members of CSOs organized across Niger that are actively lobbying for fiscal justice. However, this respondent noted that this sharing could have been more comprehensive, especially if all materials had been available in French (most were, though not all). In Ethiopia, one interviewee mentioned sharing and discussing findings with local implementing partners and government stakeholders.

We also asked interviewees what barriers stand in the way of deeper involvement of local NGOs and CSOs in evaluations. Interviewees in Ethiopia mentioned the absence of platforms to facilitate their engagement, limited ownership of evaluation processes and findings, limited capacity to engage, and high staff turnover, as well as funding constraints. Some interviewees also mentioned that donors and international NGOs (INGOs) do not always welcome the involvement of CSOs and NGOs in evaluation. CSOs are often not strong enough to demand that they be included, or there is limited space for CSOs and NGOs to express their interests to implementing organizations or donors. Interviewees in Niger similarly mentioned the limited capacity of NGOs and CSOs to engage in evaluation processes and financial constraints. How could these barriers be overcome? Interviewees proposed establishing standing multi-stakeholder platforms to involve NGOs and CSOs more permanently in INGOs' evaluation work. Some also mentioned working with NGOs and CSOs to “tool-up” in terms of evaluation skills to facilitate their participation, for example, through support to national organizations of MEAL professionals and more workshops for sharing evaluation results.

Participatory reflection sessions were broadly appreciated by interviewees (this is also supported by mini-evaluations conducted at the end of each session). Participants extracted useful information from these sessions that they applied in their own programmatic, influencing and fundraising work. Some interviewees cited reflection sessions themselves as one tool to help address barriers to greater participation in INGO evaluations.

Most interviewees described ways that they shared evaluation results and conclusions from these reflection sessions with others. Many of the recipients were colleagues in other NGOs, CSOs and government stakeholders that are affiliated with Oxfam or Oxfam’s partners. However, Ethiopia's reflection session did involve several young women and men who were themselves participants in the EYW program and evaluation. The two young people interviewed indicated that they had developed a strong sense of ownership of the results from participating in the reflection workshops. They participated in determining what went well, what did not, and possible ways forward in project implementation. They have taken and shared these experiences with their peers and used them to influence their community, youth groups, partners, and government stakeholders. Similarly, an interviewee in Niger reported sharing evaluation outcomes with representatives of CSOs across the country, providing a direct link to communities where the evaluation was conducted. In these
cases, participatory reflection sessions have gotten evaluation outcomes and results closer to the hands of people and communities who provided the data in the first place. More can and should be done, for example, by directly involving more people who participated in the evaluation in these reflections and by sharing evaluation outcomes and results in more accessible and effective ways (adapted to local language contexts, ready for sharing via social media, or preparing more simple printed materials, as one interviewee suggested).

Next steps in closing the social accountability gap

Evaluators are accountable to people and communities that participate in our evaluations, and we need to do more to foster social accountability. Participatory reflection sessions are an imperfect but pragmatic, simple way to work towards greater social accountability to get evaluation outcomes and results into the hands of people who participated in the evaluation. This knowledge is the most elemental tool people need to hold evaluators accountable.

Our review of two recent reflection sessions shows that they can help close the social accountability gap. However, the sessions do not produce this outcome automatically. We must design and run sessions that encourage the participation of those we most want to engage, not just local partners and professionals in the countries where we work. We must be attentive to the location, format, and content of sessions, and ensure that evaluation results are crafted and packaged in ways that are accessible and appealing to all. This means anticipating, planning, and budgeting for quality, accessible reflection sessions and lobbying donors to fund them. If done right, the value of these sessions will be tangible on many levels, including higher-quality evaluations.

But social accountability does not stop there. Evaluators need to do more to involve partners and communities in the design and implementation of evaluations and programs from inception. Evaluators need to make and take the time to really listen to the people and communities we work with, especially when they have critical things to say. Being truly socially accountable is a long journey but making participatory reflection sessions a part of every evaluation is a promising first step.

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This article introduces the Evaluation of the African Development Bank (AfDB)’s Engagement with Civil Society, the first of its kind led by Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) at the AfDB. It briefly sets out aspects and challenges associated with the unique methodology of this evaluation, which helped ensure that civil society views and opinions were correctly collected and reflected. It also presents selected findings and concludes with some key lessons and recommendations.
In the late 1990s, the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) first outlined its approach to engaging with civil society by releasing the “Policy and Guidelines for Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)”. In 2012, following several other milestones, a Civil Society Engagement (CSE) Framework was adopted, and a civil society division was created in 2016. In 2020, Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) assessed the Bank’s engagement with civil society during the design and implementation of its strategies and interventions and in the Bank’s processes, to learn about the successes and challenges of implementing the CSE Framework. The evaluation used a combination of evaluation approaches and mixed methods, with triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data.

For the purpose of the CSE evaluation, data on experiences, views and perceptions of civil society were collected in different ways. First, civil society representatives participated as interviewees and focus group discussion participants. Second, an online survey gathered the feedback of 290 individuals representing various types of civil society organizations (for comparison, there were 203 respondents from staff/consultants within the Bank). Third, two CSO representatives were included in the evaluation reference group, which is uncommon for other IDEV evaluations. Fourth, a sample of country program strategies and project portfolio documents were analyzed across five countries to assess the quality, the type and the frequency of CSE throughout the formulation and implementation of the AfDB country strategy and project cycle. Finally, the evaluation collected and analyzed civil society publications regarding the AfDB in particular and their criticisms towards IFIs in general, including the way it was addressed in Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network reviews.

During the evaluation process, the following key opportunities and challenges of this methodology were noted:

- The participation of civil society was crucial and central to the validity of the evaluation, since it was about AfDB engagement with them, and the results were intended to facilitate and benefit the quality of such engagement. Contrasting opinions from civil society members and AfDB staff about the Bank’s engagement across corporate, country, and project levels and mechanisms (communication, dialogue, partnership) helped corroborate results.

- Translating the survey instruments for civil society into three regional languages (English, French and Portuguese) and holding interview and focus group sessions in English and French allowed for contextualized responses.

- After significant effort, a wide range of civil society actors responded to the online survey, including Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs), CSO, international Non-Governmental Organizations (iNGOs) and academics, among others. The overall response rate was low (6%), even though a variety of Bank mediums was used.
were used to send invitations to 4,849 individuals all across Africa. The majority of respondents to the surveys of Bank staff/consultants and civil society were from Côte d’Ivoire and West Africa. A conscious effort was undertaken to balance geographical representation through interviews and online consultations.

Community-based organizations (CBOs), whose role was documented as significant in the implementation of many Bank projects especially in agriculture and water & sanitation, were hard to reach, partially due to a lower access to technology when compared to iNGOs and CSOs. Travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic impeded the evaluation team from carrying out two (of five) country visits.

Women were underrepresented among civil society actor respondents to the online survey (28%), reflecting their underrepresentation in leadership roles both among CSOs and among the Bank’s staff (39% female respondents).

The civil society interviewees and online survey respondents were generous in sharing their thoughts. Honesty was remarkable and critical and constructive reflections and suggestions were shared about the Bank’s engagement, highlighting shortcomings while acknowledging positive efforts. Notably, more than half (55%) of online survey respondents indicated they had never had an interaction with the Bank. Indeed, among the Civil Society respondents that were selected from 35 countries and were drawn from different databases, some were drawn internally from the Bank, but others were selected externally as recommended by other stakeholders.

Notable evaluation findings concerning the AfDB’s engagement with civil society include:

The broad definition of civil society stemming from the 1999 Policy has captured the diversity of civil society actors, with whom the Bank has engaged at various levels and through various mechanisms. In recognizing the wide spectrum of civil society actors, the AfDB was coherent with its external discourse on civil society. While a clear and broad definition of civil society at the AfDB has existed since the adoption of the 1999 Policy, its understanding varied considerably among AfDB staff, national stakeholders and civil society themselves. In addition, during discussions with staff in the AfDB’s regional offices and at HQ, it was emphasized that the definition of civil society according to local legislation, its level of independence, and the state of freedom in each context should be reflected in the Bank’s CSE framework, as engagement mechanisms will differ accordingly.

The evaluation found that internal and external collaborations and partnerships were a substantial driver in enhancing meaningful CSE by the AfDB, albeit often without formalities or a strong selectivity. The evaluation identified various types of partnerships between the AfDB and civil society actors (project implementation contracts, grant agreements, MOUs, etc.), but beyond a few examples, documented evidence of formal partnerships between civil society and the AfDB is sparse. Both formal and informal partnerships were largely conducted through joint activities, with more than a quarter (27%) of CSO survey respondents having first engaged with the Bank at its CSO Open Days, the CSO Forum, or at conferences.

The evaluation found an inconsistency between survey results and portfolio reviews concerning the role played by civil society actors across the
AfDB project cycle. From both the survey results and portfolio review, the evaluation found that CSOs are the connection between the Bank and communities, especially those benefitting from or affected by projects financed by the Bank. Furthermore, both CSOs (89%) and Bank staff (77%) are confident of CSOs' ability to execute and implement projects. However, limited evidence was found of CSOs actually implementing projects. The project portfolio analysis of almost 100 projects indicated that CSE often occurred in project design, but significantly less in project implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In fact, 16% of staff survey respondents indicated that the first contact with a CSO was at project preparation level. Projects which involve CSOs at the design stage usually target specialized grassroots CSOs that are considered relevant to the project subsector and serve as a bridge to the project beneficiaries (i.e. farmers or water user associations in rural areas).

The CSO Forum has been the most sustained example of corporate level dialogue by the AfDB with civil society. The first CSO Forum was held in 2009 in connection with the Bank's Annual Meetings, which was even before the release of the CSE Framework. The concept note, the outline of the CSO Forum's program and the identification of CSO contributors took into account the criteria of reputation and geographical coverage. However, there was no evidence of participation by civil society in those preparation processes. The spectrum of participating CSOs did not reflect the diversity of the African continent, and the Bank’s geographic coverage. At the same time, the call for proposals was publicly available, thus opening it up to a wide range of actors. The 2018 and 2019 CSO Fora in Abidjan showed over-representation of West African civil society, with very limited representation from Central and North Africa and in particular Lusophone Africa.

Evidence of successful collaboration with civil society was primarily related to CBOs and was mostly found in the areas of water supply, sanitation and agriculture. Portfolio reviews carried out under the framework of the case studies show several activities involving civil society. The role assigned to CSOs was primarily related to taking care of outreach activities and as beneficiaries of capacity building and to a lesser extent as project implementers. Across multiple lines of evidence, the role of civil society in monitoring projects appeared to be interchangeably used for monitoring projects’ socio-economic impacts. Evidence of either was almost non-existent, and calls for capacity building were plentiful.

Research, evaluation and knowledge generation and brokerage were found to be mutually beneficial. The relevance and importance of strategically partnering with academia was notable, but the lack of operationalized procedures limited strategic linkages to the broader CSE agenda.

Together with AfDB country and regional offices, the CSO Committee representatives from the Bank were perceived to be the most important channels to learn about the Bank. In the CSO survey, civil society representatives on the CSO Committee were ranked as the fifth most useful source of information about the AfDB. Furthermore, the evaluation found that at country and regional levels, the AfDB offices do not engage with CSOs in a sustained way. Even though Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) and Regional Integration Strategy Papers (RISPs) drive country and regional engagement with the Bank, CSP development processes failed to establish an institutional set-up.
at country level that allowed for a significant policy dialogue between civil society, the government, and other stakeholders.

Limited data from outreach activities is hindering the learning opportunities from CSO Open Day implementation, with the exception of Burkina Faso. In fact, documents were missing for CSO Open Days (i.e., attendance list) and, as a result, targeting those CSOs to collect information about the relevance and effectiveness of such events was constrained. The case of the CSO Open Day that was organized in Burkina Faso (March 2019) demonstrates that outreach activities such as these can lead to building relevant and continuous engagement that is adapted to the context. In this case, a joint CSO-AfDB committee was created to monitor the recommendations that emerged from discussions and documented in the event report. The evaluation found divergent opinions across civil society on how well the AfDB compares to other multilateral institutions. Almost 68% of the respondents to the CSO survey thought that the AfDB performed better or substantially better than others such as ECOWAS, UNDP and IFAD in terms of collaboration and promptness of engagement with civil society. The caveats expressed centered on a few areas, such as engagement in country-level processes, the lack of funding windows, and limited appreciation by civil society actors of the Bank's operational modalities. The survey confirmed that the ability to finance civil society was an important factor (entities that were cited as being capable of funding CSOs include the EU, UNICEF and USAID). Civil society actors proved to be a force for bringing forward proposals and recommendations. Both information collected from the survey and interviews with civil society actors enabled to inform the evaluation design and helped to better understand perspectives regarding relevance and coherence of the Bank's approaches to CSE, facilitators and barriers in the implementation to-date, and associated processes. Civil society organizations' voices and views were crucial in doing this evaluation as they are primarily concerned.

A few examples of key lessons and recommendations from the evaluation include the following:

Enhance awareness and common understanding of the purpose and potential value-added of CSE to the Bank's mandate by:
- Communicating more widely the guiding documents, tools and mechanisms for CSE (CSO database, CSO Forum, CSO Committee, etc.) among Bank staff, as well as CSOs, through the use of appropriate media (e.g., internal and external outreach events, publications, website, and mainstream and social media).
- Strengthening internal collaboration across the Bank's departments to consolidate CSE efforts by creating adequate space and relevant incentives.
- Developing an M&E framework for CSE that clarifies CSOs' role, the Bank's spheres of influence, dimensions of expected change, and indicators to monitor and measure results.
- Integrating the CSE output and outcome indicators into the Bank's Results Framework.
- Prioritizing learning and knowledge management around CSE.

Enhance the resourcing approach for effective implementation of CSE by:
- Developing operational guidelines to accompany the Bank's strategic
commitment to CSE at the three levels (corporate, country and project) and across existing engagement mechanisms (including communication and outreach, consultation and dialogue, and partnerships).

- Exploring alternative funding sources such as Thematic Trust Funds for projects that either involve CSOs as implementing agents or as beneficiaries.

- Ensuring adequate staffing at Bank headquarters and regional levels (including engagement of focal points at the country level) with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to foster the CSE agenda.

Strengthen CSE in policy dialogue at the country and regional levels to contribute to the Bank’s agenda of inclusive growth and good governance by:

- Providing clear guidance to foster CSE in policy dialogue in the new CSE strategy and operational guidelines.

- Setting up institutional arrangements at the country level to facilitate policy dialogue between the Bank, CSOs, governments and other stakeholders.

- Systematizing and regularize CSO open days at the country level to foster partnerships.

The evaluation team made particular efforts to seek out and include the views of civil society in this evaluation, and very much valued the engagement with civil society representatives throughout the evaluation process. We advise to read the full evaluation report and the annexes, which provide a snapshot of the respondents from civil society on the continent whose views and experiences were core to shaping the content of the report.
Endnotes

1 A theory-based approach; a Utilization-Focused Evaluation approach and a case study approach.

2 The evaluation team worked with the IT department at the Bank to administer the online survey. The survey was tested in collaboration with Bank staff/consultants and CSOs in English, French and Portuguese (CSO Survey only). The feedback from the pilot was used to refine and finalize the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary as well as confidential. A total of 4849 individuals representing CSOs were invited to participate, 290 responded, therefore a response rate of 6% to the CS survey. A set of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized afterwards with the survey respondents (CSO and Staff) who expressed the will to be contacted for a deeper discussion with the evaluation team.

3 http://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/unhabitait2015-16/Mopan%20UN%20HABITAT%20report%20%0ainteractive%5d%20%5dfinal%5d.pdf

4 These include but go beyond overall limitations of the Evaluation of the AfDB’s CSE.

5 AfDB CSO database, sampled 35 countries = 2500; original list from CSO forum list = 454; BCRM database = 341; IDEV database = 794; ECNR = 209; Lists of participants from anticorruption day in Tunis, constituency lists from selected CSO committee members, participants of CSO side events at Global Gender Summit, CSOs consulted during the development of 3 country gender profiles; participants from CSO Open days in Mauritius, African VOPE list, climate day in Abidjan, governance team, etc. = approximately 550 = 4849

6 Civil Society Open Days are organized once a year in each of the African Development Bank’s regional offices. Civil Society Organizations are invited to engage in country dialogue and be consulted on the African Development Bank’s country strategy for their country. All of the AfDB’s policies and strategies are systematically submitted to Civil Society to ensure transparency and accountability in regional member countries.

7 The Annual Civil Society Forum which brings together Civil Society representatives, AfDB senior Management and Staff Members, and government officials is a preferred platform to engage in a high level dialogue on areas of collaboration between the African Development Bank and Civil Society Organizations.

8 CSO Forum Capitalization exercise, 2019 (internal report)

9 The AfDB-Civil Society Committee’s mandate is to advise the African Development Bank on forging stronger relations and partnerships with the Civil Society Organizations community, and to help hold AfDB accountable for the implementation of the Civil Society Engagement Strategy and related Work Plan

10 First three sources were: government in the country (24%), other civil society actors and development partners (18% each)

11 A Monitoring Committee composed of executives from the Bank Country Office and CSOs was set up. The Committee consists of three members from CSOs and two members from the AfDB Country Office.
Svetlana Negroustoueva is Evaluation Function Lead at the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research. Previously she was a Principal Evaluation Officer within Independent Development Evaluation (IDeV) at the African Development Bank. She was the Task Manager for the Evaluation of the AfDB’s Civil Society Engagement and co-editor of this issue. Before joining the AfDB, she served as an M&E and Learning expert at the Climate Investment Funds (CIF)/World Bank, where she managed and quality assured 21 evaluation and learning activities. Svetlana is a Co-chair of the EvalGender+ network and an active member of the American Evaluation Association (AEA). She holds a Master’s degree in Public Affairs from the University of Texas, USA.

Ibtissem Jouini is a Senior Evaluation Specialist and Learning Facilitator. She founded the EvalChange Network in 2016. Prior to that, she worked for several international development organizations where she coached and provided technical advice to Civil Society Organizations. Recently she led and contributed to several external evaluations, mostly related to the topics of governance, gender, and youth.

Daniel Alonso Valckx is an Evaluation Specialist at the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He is responsible for country programme evaluations and is the IEO regional focal point for Africa. Prior to joining the IEO, he served as an Evaluation Officer within IDeV at the AfDB. Daniel also worked for three years as a Senior Consultant at Ernst and Young and two years in evaluation at the EU delegation in Nicaragua as part of the Young Professionals Program.
What did IDEV evaluate?

IDEV evaluated the Bank’s engagement with Civil Society at the corporate, regional member country and project levels during 2012–2019. It examined the extent to which the Bank’s conceptualization of Civil Society Engagement (CSE) has been relevant and coherent, and how effectively and efficiently CSE has been operationalized in the Bank, on the basis of the Bank’s CSE Framework. This evaluation aims to facilitate effective implementation of the Bank’s CSE Action Plan (2019–2021) and to inform the design of a new CSE Strategy.

What did IDEV find?

Relevance and coherence

The evaluation found that the conceptual and normative basis for CSE at the AfDB is partially relevant to the Bank’s priorities and coherent in key Bank documents. The 2012 CSE Framework was consistent with the Bank’s 1999 Policy and 2001 Handbook on CSE. It reflected the Bank’s operational modality and reinforced guidance on entry points for CSE at the strategic level and across the Bank’s operations. However, what the Bank aims to achieve by engaging with civil society was not made clear, and its guiding documents are not well known or understood by the Bank’s staff and Civil Society.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

The Bank’s CSE-related interventions were found to be more efficient and effective at the corporate and project levels than at the country and Regional Office levels, which was hampered by limited resources. At the corporate level, the evaluation found progress with respect to disclosure and access to information. There was also progress regarding learning and communication about CSE, with the recent introduction of the Civil Society Division’s e-newsletter. However, the evaluation found that communication is only one-way between the Bank and civil society organizations (CSOs) and that mechanisms for monitoring and learning from outreach activities were limited.

Less progress has been made on partnerships and dialogue or consultation with civil society. The most sustained example of corporate-level dialogue is the CSO Forum. At country and regional levels, it was found that AfDB Offices do not systematically engage with CSOs, but there has been improvement in involving civil society in developing Country Strategy Papers (CSPs). However, CSP development processes have limitations in providing an institutional arrangement at the country level that allows for significant policy dialogue between Civil Society, governments, and other stakeholders.

Regarding partnerships, the evaluation found internal and external collaboration to be a significant driver in enhancing meaningful CSE.
What lessons did IDEV draw?

- Inadequate internal awareness limited the use of existing CSE mechanisms and institutional structures (CSO database, CSO Officers, CSE Framework) to enhance CSE, hindering the desired outcomes.

- The lack of a proper monitoring, evaluation and learning framework deterred the sharing of lessons learned and reduced the opportunities to build the business case for CSE. Learning was also hindered by limited discussion of competencies versus capacities.

- Lessons from the Bank and development partners point toward the potential usefulness of a credible and reliable accreditation system for Africa-based CSOs. Such a system could enhance selectivity and mitigate reputational and operational risks for Bank staff in partnering with Civil Society.

- Conducting country- or region-specific mapping of Civil Society in line with the Bank's mandate and development priorities would help to contextualize the Bank's CSE and foster an enabling environment for CSOs.

- The lack of sustained and systemized two-way communication mechanisms between Civil Society and the Bank across all levels (corporate, country and project) impeded meaningful engagement.

What did IDEV recommend?

1. Enhance awareness and common understanding of the purpose and potential value-added of CSE to the Bank's mandate.

2. Enhance the resourcing approach for effective implementation of CSE.

3. Strengthen CSE in policy dialogue at the country and regional levels to contribute to the Bank's agenda of inclusive growth and good governance.

What did Management Respond?

Management welcomed IDEV's evaluation of the Bank's Civil Society Engagement and acknowledged IDEV's recommendations to increase awareness, build a common understanding, and better resource CSE, particularly at the country and regional levels. This evaluation was timely, as Management will soon begin designing a CSE strategy that will outline the trajectory of the Bank's engagement with Civil Society and articulate ways to better mainstream CSE into Bank policies and operations. Overall, IDEV's recommendations are broadly in line with Management's thinking, and Management will leverage these recommendations to inform the Bank's new CSE strategy.
2020: IDEV proves resilient in turbulent times

2020 was a year of resilience and adaptability for IDEV. It was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which affected staff’s way of working. Despite AfDB employees working from home since March 2020, IDEV was able to ensure business continuity and even exceeded its target for 2020 by delivering a record 20 evaluation products. Due to travel restrictions, the Department faced numerous challenges in conducting empirical data collection and site visits for its evaluations. It however managed to deliver its core Work Program by employing remote data collection tools, such as virtual and online communication to interact with external stakeholders and Evaluation Reference Groups. New sources of evidence such as “big data” and geo-spatial data sets were also used. Likewise, knowledge events and evaluation capacity development events were organized virtually, enabling the participation of a wider audience.

2020 also marked 40 years of evaluation at the AfDB, which was celebrated at a dedicated session at the Evaluation Week held in December. IDEV has learned a lot in 2020 and is determined to harness lessons from its evaluations and from this new way of working to contribute to building back better after the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information, please visit the 2020 full year in review at:

IDEV supports Ivorian 'Evaluation Lab' themed "Evaluation in a crisis situation"

IDEV supported a training "Evaluation Lab" themed "Evaluation in a crisis situation", from 16 – 18 February 2021, in Abidjan. The workshop, organized by the Ivorian Initiative for Evaluation (2IEval) in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Development, Côte d’Ivoire, and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), gathered thirty evaluation actors from Côte d’Ivoire. The goal of the workshop was to strengthen their capacities and aimed at better equipping them to carry out their missions in an environment marked by COVID-19 measures and restrictions, but also to foster the urgent establishment of a national coalition to fill the gaps in evaluation and ensure continued action to achieve the objectives of the 2021–2025 Ivorian National Development Plan.

For more information on this workshop, please visit the article at:


Learning event: Reinforcing the AfDB’s Engagement in Fragile Situations

On 24 February 2021, IDEV and the AfDB’s Transition States Coordination Office organized a virtual learning event on the theme, “Reinforcing the AfDB’s engagement in fragile situations”. The event, which coincided with the release of an independent evaluation of the AfDB’s Strategy for Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience in Africa, aimed at enhancing awareness and discourse on the potential of the AfDB’s current Fragility and Resilience Strategy and on the ongoing process for developing a new Bank Strategy.

For more information on this learning event, please visit the article at:

APNODE and IDEV participate in a discussion on Evidence Use by Parliaments during COVID-19

On 31 March 2021, Twende Mbele organized a webinar entitled ‘Evidence Use by Parliaments during COVID’ in which participated Hon Evelyn Mpagi-Kaabule, Chairperson of the African Parliamentarians’ Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE). Other speakers were Senator Sylvia Mueni Kasanga of the Parliament of Kenya, and Dr. Wilhelm Janse van Rensburg of the Parliament of South Africa. The webinar aimed to assess the effects of COVID on the oversight and representation functions of parliaments, the uptake of evidence, and its use in response to the pandemic. Many key takeaways were drawn from this event, and it was agreed that the discussion would be pursued during the gLOCAL Evaluation Week.

For more information on this webinar, please visit the article at:

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This evaluation of the African Development Bank’s Country Strategy and Program in Mali covers the 2005–2019 period, including 109 operations with a total value of nearly UA 1 billion. By presenting the results achieved, the report fulfills the Bank’s accountability mandate to stakeholders. The findings, lessons and recommendations of this evaluation aim at enabling the Bank and its stakeholders in Mali to improve the design and implementation of future development operations in the country and strengthening the evaluation capacities of development actors in the country.

Find out more:

Impact Evaluation of the AfDB-supported small-scale irrigation projects in Malawi

IDEV has conducted an evaluation of the AfDB’s support to two irrigation infrastructure development projects in Malawi of UA 15 million each, completed in 2014 and 2017, respectively. The projects in question are the 2006-2014 Smallholder Crop Production and Marketing Project that covered 13 districts across the nation and the 2009-2017 Agriculture Infrastructure Services Project, which covered seven districts in Southern Malawi. The evaluation aims to generate knowledge and provide lessons to maximize the impact of ongoing and future irrigation development interventions.

Find out more:

This report presents the findings of IDEV’s first country evaluation of the AfDB strategy and program in the Arab Republic of Egypt, covering a crucial period for the country: 2009–2018, including pre-revolution, revolution, and post-revolution. During this period, the AfDB portfolio in the country amounted to about USD 2.5 billion. The evaluation aims to account for the AfDB’s operations in Egypt and to foster learning to help improve the Bank’s future country strategy and program.


**Evaluation of the AfDB’s Assistance to the Energy Sector, 1999-2018: Refocusing Support for Improved and Sustained Energy Access in Africa**

This report summarizes the evidence, findings and lessons from an independent evaluation of the support provided by the AfDB to the energy sector over the period 1999-2018, for an amount of 18 billion USD. The evaluation aimed to help the Bank to account for its investments in the energy sector and learn from its experience so as to inform future strategic and operational directions for the Bank’s assistance to the sector, through the New Deal on Energy for Africa (NDEA), and contribute to improving the performance of the sector in its regional member countries.

Evaluation Week 2020 special edition

As part of the UN’s ‘Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030’, a global call was made for timely data and evidence-based policymaking to boost progress on the SDGs. A core part of the evidence base for decision making and development programming can be drawn from evaluation. In this context, the AfDB’s biennial Development Evaluation Week (2-4 December 2020) focused on how effective learning from evaluation is linked to the delivery of sustainable development results. This issue of eVALUation Matters adds to the discourse that took place at Evaluation Week 2020 and takes a deep dive into some of the key issues discussed during the event.


This edition explores how the fourth industrial revolution, digitization and the associated boom in disruptive technologies are shaping the practice of evaluation primarily in Africa, and its implications for the African Development Bank’s work.

First Quarter 2020: Promoting an Evaluation Culture in 2020 and Beyond

A “culture of evaluation” is often lauded as a key solution to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of governments, development organizations and international financial institutions alike.

Fourth Quarter 2019: Made in Africa Evaluations Volume 2: Practical Applications

This edition and second volume on ‘Made in Africa Evaluations (MAE)’, explores practical indigenous evaluation applications and how they can fast-track the achievement of the continental development compacts – the UN Agenda 2030 and its SDGs and the African Union Commission’s Agenda 2063. Contributors also explore the application of the MAE concept and what MAE evaluations should look like in practice.
Civil Society in Evaluation