
What did IDEV evaluate?
IDEV evaluated the Country Strategy and Program of the African Development Bank in Benin over the period 2012-2021. The objective of this evaluation was twofold: to report on the Bank’s interventions in Benin and their contributions to national development results; and to draw lessons and recommendations that will inform and improve the design of the next Bank’s assistance strategy in Benin for the period 2022–2026.

The Bank’s strategies made it possible to finance 31 projects for a total amount of 688 million Units of Account (equivalent to 980 million USD) in the infrastructure sectors (transport, energy, water and sanitation), agricultural, and governance sectors (see Figure 1).

What are IDEV’s findings?
The Bank’s interventions in the various sectors of activity were aligned with the policies, strategies, priorities, and key needs of the Government and the beneficiaries. In general, the Bank’s intervention over the 2012–2021 period enabled a satisfactory strengthening of infrastructure in Benin.

Evaluation criteria
To measure the Bank’s contribution to development results in Benin in each sector, IDEV used the four criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability, on a four-level rating scale (see Table 1).
What are the national development challenges and strategies on which the Bank has provided its support?

Benin’s main challenges

Benin faces several development challenges, including an infrastructure deficit, governance shortcomings, low productivity impacting competitiveness and the structural transformation of the economy, high vulnerability to climatic hazards, and non-inclusive economic growth. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic poses new challenges that call for a strengthening of the health system, social protection, and care for the most vulnerable groups, and for better resilience in the private sector and mobilization of additional funding to counter the effects of COVID.

Main development strategies of Benin

In 2000, Benin adopted “Benin 2025 Alafia,” a forward-looking development vision. During the period under review, four national strategic or operational documents were successively taken into account:

- The Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS 2011–2015) encompasses operational areas ranging from sustainable growth to economic transformation, infrastructure, human capital, governance, and development of the national space.

- The Government Action Program (GAP 2016–2021) is based on three pillars: democracy, the economy, and improving people’s lives. It emphasizes agriculture, tourism, education, strengthening basic social services, and social protection.

- The National Development Plan (NDP 2018–2025) focuses on three main pillars, namely, human capital and the well-being of populations, economic growth, environmental issues such as climate change, territorial development and governance.

- The COVID-19 Response Strategy to mitigate the negative socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

What does the evaluation reveal about each sector during the period under review?

Despite very good performance for some sectors, the evaluation reveals that non-compliance with the implementation schedule constitutes the greatest weakness of the Bank’s portfolio in Benin over the period under review. Significant delays were noted for the vast majority of projects and for all sectors.

Infrastructure

The Bank’s objective was to invest in strengthening infrastructure to support competitiveness and regional integration, with emphasis on transport (39% of approvals), energy (19%), and water and sanitation (13%).

Transport

In the transport sector, 100% of the road improvements planned under closed or nearing completion projects were carried out.

Road constructions evaluated

- 77.5 km Lomé-Cotonou road
- 77 km N’Dali-Nikki-Nigeria border road section
- 16.8 km highways that cut across the town of Parakou

Although these roads have contributed to improving the movement of people and goods as well as regional trade, the evaluation reveals weaknesses in road maintenance, which threatens the sustainability of the road projects in the short/medium term.

Energy

Significant results have been achieved in the energy sector, although targets have not always been met notably due to delays in project implementation.
In addition, the evaluation found relatively good coordination between the energy and governance sectors as a result of the integration of a strong “energy” dimension in the Bank’s budget support programs.

**Water and sanitation**

A large number of works in drinking water supply, hygiene and sanitation were carried out and yielded results. Success stories include the rural drinking water supply and sanitation program. However, critical capacity-building activities in water resource management were not carried out. Regarding sewage sludge management, the products and effects did not meet expectations.

**Agriculture**

In the agriculture sector, the Bank’s focus was on developing agricultural and agro-industrial value chains (19% of approvals). Projects targeted regions showing significant agricultural potential, but which are economically and socially disadvantaged. Closed or well-advanced projects achieved their tangible products at about 80% of set targets, resulting in a satisfactory increase in production capacity and improved living conditions for the beneficiaries. Project targets were met at 100% in hydro-agricultural infrastructure (7 agro-pastoral dams rehabilitated for a water volume of 600,000 m³); the construction of warehouses (9 warehouses built); the rehabilitation of rural roads (162 km of roads rehabilitated), the construction of livestock markets (7 markets) and forest management and reforestation, where targets were exceeded (121.19% of completion rate). However, results relating to the development of entrepreneurship remain insufficient.

**Governance**

The Bank’s objective was to invest in promoting good governance (10% of approvals). With more than 80% of reforms achieved, the Bank’s actions made it possible to strengthen public finance management, public procurement, the business environment, and policies to support private sector development, and governance in the energy sector. Mechanisms for dialogue with the government and coordination with the other technical and financial partners are satisfactory for the sector, although there is a persistent need for better coordination between the institutional players in the sector.

**Crosscutting issues in the Bank’s program**

The evaluation points to a lack of gender mainstreaming in interventions in Benin. However, inclusiveness has been accommodated in the agriculture pillar by targeting economically disadvantaged areas that demonstrate strong agricultural potential. In addition, the Bank is an important partner for Benin in environmental protection, particularly in forestry.

**What lessons did IDEV draw?**

The evaluation presented important lessons from the Bank’s experience for its future engagement in Benin and in other countries in similar contexts:

1. The Bank’s ability to adapt to changes in strategic direction, vulnerability situations and climate, and health shocks, has enabled it to meet the country’s needs effectively.
2. Structured and well-sequenced approaches can contribute significantly to the country’s regional integration.
3. A better understanding of the private sector and especially its structural problems, together with targeted policy dialogue, facilitates the implementation of private sector projects.
4. Long and persistent delays lead to neglect of institution-building activities.
5. The deployment of sector experts to the Country Office promotes policy dialogue, coordination with other technical and financial partners operating in the country, and the achievement of Bank strategy and program outcomes.

**What did IDEV recommend for the next strategy?**

1. Improve the sustainability of the outcomes of Bank operations by the Bank establishing management and maintenance systems for the infrastructure, equipment, and services.
2. Strengthen development results-based management by: (i) Improving the linkage between the development goals and the results framework in the Country Strategy Paper; (ii) Improving the monitoring and evaluating outputs, outcomes and impacts to facilitate project coordination through sustained dialogue with other stakeholders; (iii) Designing
a realistic implementation plan to manage operations and establishing a baseline and a monitoring-evaluation system.

3. Improve the quality at entry of operations. Capacity-building, particularly, in procurement and reporting, and institution-building needs could be assessed before initiating investments.

4. Strengthen the Bank’s capacity to engage in permanent policy dialogue by developing a coherent and complementary portfolio of analytical studies, by targeting the areas in which the Bank has real added value and expertise and by providing and devoting targeted resources to policy dialogue.

5. Strengthen support for private sector development (PSD) and public-private partnerships by continuing the analytical work on conducive conditions to private sector development and assist the Government in removing constraints to the sector.

What was the methodological approach?

The evaluation was based on a Theory of Change with a bottom-up approach, allowing in-depth analyses at the project, sector, and country strategy levels. The sector notes and the portfolio analysis were consolidated in a technical report to prepare the evaluation summary report.

What did Management Respond?

Management welcomed the findings, lessons, conclusions, and five main recommendations of the evaluation, which are in line with the findings made during project monitoring and supervision missions and portfolio performance reviews. The recommendations of the evaluation will be used to design the new country strategy for the period 2022–2026 and will guide the implementation of current operations and the design of future operations.