Mauritania:
Executive Summary

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Introduction

Located in North-West Africa, Mauritania is the continent’s 11th largest country with a low population density of 4 inhabitants/km². The country has a population of 4.6 million inhabitants, 56.9% of whom live in urban areas, with a life expectancy of 65.1 years in 2020, which is above the African average (63 years), but below the North Africa average (74 years).

This evaluation of the country strategy and programme of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB or ‘the Bank’) for Mauritania follows the previous evaluation covering the 1994-2004 period. It covers the 2011-2020 period, in particular the Results-Based Country Strategy Paper (RBCSP) 2011-2015 and the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) 2016-2020. The latter was updated and extended to December 2022 by the Bank in April 2021 in order “to align its next CSP for the country with the 2016-2030 Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity Strategy (SCAPP) action plan for the second period (2021-2025), whose implementation has been delayed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and to guarantee the relevance of the current CSP to efforts to address the health crisis.” This extension period is not covered by this evaluation, whose data collection and analysis work had already been completed in August 2021.

National Development Framework

In 2020, the Government prepared a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) covering the 2001-2015 period that aims to lay the foundations of accelerated and sustained economic growth that would create jobs, reduce unemployment, and sustainably improve the population’s quality of life. Its 2011-2015 Five-Year Action Plan, which had four strategic thrusts and one cross-cutting thrust, served as the basis for the Bank’s RBCSP 2011-2015. In 2016, the Government adopted SCAPP 2016-2030 to address challenges that persisted following the completion of PRSP 2011-2015. Its aim is to strengthen economic resilience and promote inclusive (or shared) economic growth. For each of these three strategic levers, the Government defined priority areas on which CSP 2016-2020 was based.

Bank’s Assistance and Implementation Context

During RBCSP 2011-2015, the Bank’s assistance was intended to “contribute to the achievement of Mauritania’s priority objectives focused on strengthening the competitiveness of the economy and poverty reduction” through two strategic pillars, namely: i) infrastructure development; and ii) improved economic and financial governance. During CSP 2016-2020, Bank assistance focused on i) promoting agricultural transformation (Pillar I), and ii) increasing power supply (Pillar II), in order to achieve the key objective of “helping Mauritania achieve inclusive and green growth” in order to improve the living conditions of the people (or to achieve shared prosperity). As at 31 December 2020, the Bank had financed 24 projects in Mauritania over the 2011-2020 period, worth UA 154.26 million (USD 215.96 million in December 2021), in 7 sectors of intervention: industry, mines and quarries, transport, agriculture, finance, the multisector, water and sanitation and the social sector. The volume of approvals quintupled from one CSP to the next. The average envelope per project has increased by 141%, from UA 2.5 million to UA 6 million. The African Development Fund (ADF) financed 54.5% of all operations. The Government’s counterpart contribution was UA 12.1 million. Absent during the RBCSP 2011-2015, the private sector grew during
CSP 2016-2020 and represented 34.7% of approvals for the entire evaluation period (2011-2020). Co-financed projects amounted to UA 195.4 million, backed by a UA 19.7 million ADF contribution.

While the country benefited from a favourable economic context at the start of RBCSP 2011-2015, this was not the case for CSP 2016-2020, which was marked by a drop in the price of iron ore, the country’s main export product. The external trade deficit widened during the evaluation period. The situation deteriorated in early 2020 following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, whose impact on the country exceeded the African average. Economic activity fell by 3.6%. The budget surplus of the previous year gave way to a budget deficit. Foreign direct investment inflows fell sharply by almost 63%. However, GDP per capita and gross national income per capita grew steadily over the evaluation period. The incidence of poverty declined while the Human Development Index score improved over the years, from 0.453 in 2011 to 0.546 in 2019. However, income distribution remained unequal with a Gini coefficient of 32.6 in 2014.

Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this evaluation is to enable the Bank’s management to: i) report to stakeholders on the outcomes achieved with the resources provided; and ii) improve its development effectiveness through lessons learned, particularly to guide the preparation and implementation of the next CSP 2023-2027 for Mauritania. The specific objective of this Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation (CSPE) is to assess the relevance of the Bank’s assistance to Mauritania, including its selectivity, the effectiveness of its strategies and programmes in the country and their contribution to the achievement of national development goals, their sustainability, internal and external coherence, efficiency, and mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues.

This summary report is supplemented by a second volume comprising technical annexes.

Methodology and Limitations

The evaluation was guided by eight questions centred on the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, internal and external coherence, efficiency, mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues and learning. Each evaluation criterion and sub-criterion is rated on a clearly defined four-point scale: highly satisfactory, satisfactory, partly unsatisfactory, and unsatisfactory. The evaluation team consulted stakeholders during the design stage of this evaluation to promote the use of its findings. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, evaluation data was collected through online interviews and the review of existing documentation (Bank’s corporate and project documents) and the Bank’s project database (SAP Project System). Project task managers at the Bank’s headquarters and other colleagues at the Bank’s North Africa Region involved in operation implementation provided electronic inputs in the form of implementation data, comments on evaluation findings and reviews of draft preliminary reports. Evaluation sub-questions concerning cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis have remained unanswered due to lack of data. However, the quality of the CSPE is intact as data has been provided for the key indicators, resulting in well-documented evaluation findings.

This executive summary presents the evaluation findings based on criteria grouped under two broad concerns: What is the Bank’s contribution to Mauritania’s development outcomes, and how did the Bank design and manage its operations in the country? It then draws lessons from implementation of the assistance and makes recommendations for improvement to the Bank’s Management.

Bank Contribution to Development Outcomes

The relevance of the Bank’s strategies and programs was rated satisfactory. The relevance of the CSPs to the country’s priorities was highly satisfactory, as all the pillars of the CSPs are aligned. The programming of assistance for the 2011-2015
and 2016-2020 periods coincided with the introduction of a new national reference framework, respectively the PRSP 2011-2015 and SCAPP 2016-2030. Among the 24 projects approved over the period, 87.2% have their objectives aligned with one of the components of national strategies, which is satisfactory. All the pillars of the CSPs and related projects/programmes were aligned with the Bank’s own strategic priorities, in particular the following: Industrialise Africa; Improve Quality of Life for the People of Africa; Feed Africa; and Integrate Africa, which is highly satisfactory. In contrast, the involvement of civil society, beneficiaries, the private sector and universities, which is necessary to take their concerns into account, has been found partly unsatisfactory. It was limited to the validation of strategic choices during policy dialogue as part of CSP preparation missions. The country has multinational projects, but few of them are directly and explicitly linked to the Bank’s most recent regional strategy that covers the period 2020-2026. The Bank’s selectivity was rated satisfactory. Taking into account the mid-term adjustment of the second CSP, it emerges that the Bank intervened with projects in the six areas of results for which it has a comparative advantage, out of the seven areas targeted in that CSP. However, no project to improve access to electricity in rural and urban areas was approved, despite this outcome being targeted in the two CSPs. Implementation of the Indicative Operational Programme (IOP) was rated satisfactory because seven of the eleven projects slated at CSP approval were approved (63.63%). The five emergency assistance operations approved over the period helped address floods (2012, 2014, and 2019) or COVID-19 response needs. The Bank conducted 6 unplanned economic and sector works (ESWs) and 5 of the 8 planned ESWs.

The effectiveness of the Bank’s strategies and programmes was rated satisfactory. At CSP national level, effectiveness was rated satisfactory with two of the four objectives achieved as follows. During the 2011-2015 period, the economy was less competitive than expected. The competitiveness index score declined from 3.14 to 3.0 between the beginning and end of the period under consideration. However, poverty was reduced as planned from a rate of 42% in 2008 to 31% in 2014. Extreme rural poverty declined from 40.8% to 25.1% over the same period. Over the 2016-2020 period, the country partly achieved the objective of a more inclusive and greener growth. The economy grew at a GDP growth rate, excluding extractive industries, that rose from 1.6% in 2016 to 5% in 2018. The percentage of wage earners rose from 42.8% in 2016 to 43.8% in 2019, which suggests inclusive growth. The percentage of vulnerable jobs declined from 54% to 52%. Regarding green growth, the proportion of renewable energy in the energy mix rose from 13.37% in 2015 to 41% in 2018. It was expected to reach 50% following new construction work, but that objective was not achieved as the Bank did not finance any operations in the sub-sector due to a lack of resources. In contrast, effectiveness at pillar level was rated partly unsatisfactory, with 42.8% of objectives achieved and 27.2% of expected outputs delivered or expected to be. Community access to drinking water increased, and the institutional capacities of government services were strengthened, but the business climate did not improve sufficiently to have the expected positive impact on the economy’s competitiveness. In addition, failure to implement the project to increase power supply was a limiting factor that prevented the expected improvement of the economy’s competitiveness. Overall, implementation of the IOPs was satisfactory (50-64%). Operational performance was rated satisfactory since almost 60% of expected outputs were achieved or deemed achievable.

The following factors contributed to these outcomes: (a) The Bank was unable to assist the country in removing obstacles that cause frequent delays and lengthen implementation periods, due among others, to irregular project supervision. Over half of the projects were extended at least once; (b) There is a strong synergy between Bank operations and those of other TFPs with more resources, especially in energy, agriculture, public governance, and financial sector development,
which contributed to the achievement of poverty reduction and inclusive and green growth outcomes; (c) There are shortcomings in the CSP theory of change, especially regarding the linkage of outcomes at national, pillar and operation levels; (d) Effectiveness at pillar level over time improved with an output delivery rate that rose from 17.8% in 2011-2015 to 27.2% in 2016-2020, thanks to, inter alia, adjustments to the pillars or IOPs following mid-term reviews, the physical presence of a resident country programme officer starting in 2018, and the intensification of dialogue with the national authorities which made it possible to adapt to changes in context and remove obstacles to the implementation of operations.

The sustainability of the Bank’s programmes and strategies was rated satisfactory overall, but some aspects continue to require further attention. The achievements of all completed or closed projects were sustained or deemed sustainable. All the projects for the period involved target communities, and their Project Implementation Units (PIU) were integrated into the services of the oversight Ministry, thus increasing the level of ownership by beneficiaries. However, only 33.3% of these projects had implemented a mechanism to ensure the sustainability of achievements and the mobilisation of revenue to finance recurrent costs, although this was planned in the design of 5 of the 6 projects completed or closed and in 10 of the 16 ongoing projects. Regarding capacity-building, only 42.9% of projects had implemented one or more related activities. Concerning the implementation of environmental and social safeguards in category I & II projects, it should be noted that 20%, 28.6% and 33.3% of these projects respectively documented the implementation of the agreed measures, secured a budget to finance the monitoring of their implementation, and effectively appointed an officer to monitor their implementation located at the PIU. These weak links in the Bank’s exit strategy require strengthening in order to provide the necessary guarantee that the outcomes of the Bank’s assistance in the country will be sustained.

How did the Bank design and manage its assistance?

The coherence of the Bank’s interventions was rated satisfactory. Of the 19 Bank projects (excluding the five emergency assistance operations), 17 complemented each other (internal coherence). Furthermore, all Bank projects were complementary with the operations of at least two development partners active in Mauritania (external coherence). For example, the Rosso Bridge Construction Project, which connects the country with Senegal and has strong national and regional economic development potential, is jointly financed by the Bank, the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Union (EU) and the States of Senegal and Mauritania. In the agricultural sector, the Bank has aligned its projects and emergency assistance operations with the operations of the World Bank focused on livestock through structuring projects (Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project - PRAPS, USD 45 million). Other institutions have done likewise, including the EU (RIMRAP, RIMDIR and RIMFIL projects), GIZ (Project for the Promotion of Employment and Professional Integration in Rural Areas (PELIMIR) and AFD (CAP Insertion).

The efficiency of the Bank’s strategies and programmes was rated satisfactory. The number of operations rose from 11 to 21 between CSP 2011-2015 and CSP 2016-2020, and the volume of approvals quintupled from UA 27.5 million to UA 126.7 million. The average envelope per project rose from UA 2.5 million to 6.0 million. The country is therefore mobilising more and more resources, as it had planned to obtain UA 95.52 million during CSP 2016-2020 and raised UA 126.75 million, i.e. 1.32 times its performance-based allocation (PBA). For all completed or closed projects, the budgets allocated were adhered to (100%). However, only half the projects completed or closed adhered to the implementation deadlines. The disbursement rate for ongoing projects is 35.6% for an average age of 3.5 years, which is unsatisfactory. Two bottlenecks are affecting operational efficiency, namely pre-
implementation delays and a low disbursement rate. Problems exist at both country and Bank levels. The Bank has been unable to eliminate these impediments to smooth implementation, partly due to irregular project supervision.

**Mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues was rated partly unsatisfactory.** Specific objectives were set for certain cross-cutting issues in some of the 24 projects approved during the 2011-2020 period. Youth employment and climate change adaptation and/or mitigation were an objective in three (12.5%) and five (20.8%) projects respectively. Although one specific gender promotion objective appeared in two projects (8.3%), 16 others (66.7%) implemented various gender equality and women’s promotion activities (quota, targeted activities, inclusion of specific indicators in the results-based logical framework, etc.). Addressing fragility was a specific objective in four projects (16.7%), which is low, considering that the Bank carried out a preliminary study on the drivers of fragility and opportunities for resilience. Private sector development was the objective of four projects (16.7%), and the Bank has financed five non-sovereign operations in the country for a total of UA 53.5 million, i.e. 35% of the country’s resource allocation.

**Lessons**

**Lesson 1:** In countries with low PBAs, additional Bank resources are successfully leveraged when the regional and/or country team implements a pro-active strategy.

Between the RBCSP 2011-2015 and CSP 2016-2020, the volume of approvals quintupled and the average envelope per project increased by 141%. Considering the IOP at approval and the adjustment made at CSP 2016-2020 mid-term, Mauritania planned to obtain UA 95.52 million to finance operations over the period. It succeeded in raising UA 126.75 million, i.e. 1.32 times its PBA.

**Lesson 2:** The private sector is a key driver of the country’s development.

While there was no private sector operation in Mauritania’s RBCSP 2011-2015, it only required five operations during CSP 2016-2020 (one direct loan, two lines of credit and two guarantees) for the private sector to represent 34.7% of approvals for the entire evaluation period (2011-2020). For example, the direct loan for the National Industrial and Mining Company (SNIM) dredging project contributed to the objectives of developing the mining sector by increasing exports of iron ore, the country’s main source of foreign exchange. SNIM has become one of the world’s leading iron ore producers. In addition, lines of credit and guarantees to Banque Populaire de Mauritanie (BPM) and the Bank for Trade and Industry (BCI) have helped to increase financing for Mauritanian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in industry, mining, fisheries, trade, and transport.

**Lesson 3:** The careful selection of sectors of intervention and systematic alignment of Bank projects with the operations of the main development partners in the country (external coherence) contributes significantly to the effectiveness of a strategy aimed at mobilizing more financing and achieve national development objectives.

- Social and economic infrastructure as well as governance are the main sectors of intervention, as they absorbed about half of the Official Development Assistance envelope received by the country. By targeting these sectors, the Bank was able to leverage UA 175.7 million from co-financiers for projects worth a total of UA 195.4 million over the period, including UA 19.7 million from the ADF; i.e., a leverage effect of 1 to 8.9.

- As presented above under the heading ‘effectiveness’, one of the two national objectives set in CSP 2016-2020 and one of the two objectives of RBCSP 2011-2015
were achieved even though the Bank had not completely delivered the outputs expected at the pillar level during the period. In fact, the outcomes of operations are more closely aligned with national outcomes than pillar outcomes. The contribution of the other development partners (USD 3,697.5 million in 2019, of which the Bank provided 3.4%) was significant, and their strong complementarity with the Bank’s operations expedited the direct translation of the Bank operations’ outcomes into outcomes targeted at national level.

Lesson 4: Operations’ effectiveness does not guarantee the achievement of the expected outcomes at the various higher levels.

Operations’ achievements did not translate into achievement of the expected pillar outcomes. In other words, implementation of the operations did not sufficiently contribute to the attainment of pillar outcomes to fulfil the theory of change of Bank assistance. This situation reflects the weaknesses already noted in the theory of change of Bank assistance, in particular the reliability and feasibility of the causal chain between the outcomes defined at the three levels during programming (national outcomes, pillar outcomes, IOP and operations’ outcomes).

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Improve the articulation between the targeted objectives at national and pillar levels and the expected results of the operations programmed in the country assistance strategy, taking into consideration:

a) the reliability and feasibility (in the actual country context) of the results chain (causal relationship) between the three levels of action: operations, pillar and national; b) the volatility resulting from frequent IOP changes; c) the lifespan of operations programmed in the IOP in selecting the planning horizon for the expected CSP results; and d) adequate sizing of the CSP’s targeted results relative to the estimated resource allocation to finance operations in the country over the period.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that the rhythm of two supervisions per year is adhered to.

On these occasions, the timely provision of the necessary sector specialists and budget could help to remove the impediments to the smooth implementation of operations (insufficient familiarity with the Bank’s applicable rules and procedures, poor quality of disbursement requests, delays in mobilising counterpart funds, lack of diligence in the procurement procedure; etc.). These more regular supervisions can also provide opportunities to guide and advise national stakeholders and possibly hold fiduciary clinics and in-situ training sessions.

Recommendation 3: Foresee mechanisms that ensure the sustainability of benefits right from the design of Bank operations and monitor their effective implementation.

Currently planned mechanisms, such as cost-recovery to finance the recurrent costs of community infrastructure and equipment as well as building local ownership and participation capacities (exit strategy), must be effectively implemented to ensure the sustainability of the Bank’s impact on the country’s development.

Recommendation 4: Improve the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues in the CSPs and the Bank’s operations.

In particular promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment, youth employment, fragility and resilience, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and private sector development. It is recommended to include specific objectives at the design stage, especially in results-based logical frameworks, modelled on the Bank’s gender marker system, so that these cross-cutting issues are at the core of all stakeholders’ activities during the implementation of operations. This integration mechanism could be complemented by other arrangements.
About this evaluation

Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) has carried out an evaluation of the Country Strategy and Program (CSP) of the African Development Bank Group (“the Bank”) in Mauritania. It covers the 2011-2020 period, in particular the Results-Based Country Strategy Paper (RBCSP) 2011-2015 and the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) 2016-2020. During this period, the Bank financed 24 projects in Mauritania, worth USD 218 million, in 7 sectors of intervention: industry, mines, quarries; transport; agriculture; finance; water and sanitation; social sector; and the multisector. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the relevance of the Bank’s assistance to Mauritania, including its selectivity, the effectiveness of its strategies and programs and their contribution to the achievement of national development goals, their sustainability, internal and external coherence, efficiency, and mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues. This will enable the Bank’s Management to: i) report to stakeholders the outcomes achieved with the resources provided; and ii) improve its development effectiveness by learning lessons, particularly to guide the preparation and implementation of the next Mauritania CSP for 2023-2027.

The evaluation found that all the pillars of the CSPs were aligned to the country’s priorities and 87.2% of approved projects during the period had their objectives aligned with one of the components of national strategies. The relevance of the Bank’s strategies and programs was therefore rated satisfactory. However, the involvement of civil society, beneficiaries, the private sector, and universities was unsatisfactory. Although these actors participated in the validation of strategic choices, they were not included at the operations level. Poverty was reduced as planned from a rate of 42% in 2008 to 31% in 2014 as well as extreme rural poverty from 40.8% to 25.1% over the same period. Furthermore, the country partly achieved the objective of a more inclusive and greener growth. This led to effectiveness being rated satisfactory. As for sustainability of the Bank’s strategies and programs, it was assessed as satisfactory overall. However, there is room for improvement to ensure sustainability of achievements and mobilization of financial resources for recurrent costs in addition to the monitoring of implementation of environmental and social management measures.

Some of the recommendations for the Bank included improving the articulation between the targeted objectives at national and pillar levels and the expected results of the operations during programming and implementation. The recommendations also included ensuring that the rhythm of two supervisions per year is adhered to. Furthermore, the AfDB was recommended to foresee mechanisms that ensure the sustainability of benefits right from the design of Bank operations and monitor their effective implementation. At last, the Bank was advised to improve the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues in the CSPs and the Bank’s operations, in particular gender equality promotion and women’s empowerment, youth employment, fragility and resilience, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and private sector development.