

## The CEDR Journey

*In 2016 IDEV delivered the Comprehensive Evaluation of the Development Results of the African Development Bank Group 2004–2013 (CEDR) among other high level evaluations. The CEDR was the most complex and massive evaluation ever undertaken by IDEV in terms of scope and scale. Hence it required and utilized a lot of resources: financial, human and time. The evaluation lasted 3 years and involved almost all of IDEV staff. The IDEV Work Program had to be adjusted and more funds were raised to accommodate the evaluation. This article describes how the CEDR unfolded and IDEV's experience in staying true to evaluation principles in the conduct of the CEDR. It does not focus on the destination, but rather seeks to chart the journey.*

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## How it all started

**E**VERY journey begins with the first step and in hindsight the surprise at IDEV was probably that an evaluation of this scope and scale had not been done much earlier. The Comprehensive Evaluation of the Development Results (CEDR) of the African Development Bank (AfDB or the Bank) was unlike any that Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) had ever undertaken. The scope of the CEDR covered all interventions approved by the AfDB between 2004 and 2013. It was massive and challenging in terms of assessing the large set of projects made up from diverse instruments and targeting multiple categories of beneficiaries in several countries and sectors<sup>1</sup>.

Rakesh Nangia, the Evaluator-General, recounts the genesis of the CEDR: “at a Board Meeting there arose a request to IDEV from both the African Development Fund (ADF) Deputies and the AfDB Board who wanted to know how the Bank’s resources have been utilized and towards what development outcomes?”<sup>2</sup> Mindful of the importance of this question in supporting the Bank to improve its development effectiveness, he of course agreed to commit IDEV to satisfy the request. Now reflecting on the tumultuous route plodded in delivering the final CEDR, he might have had second thoughts.

### Lesson 1: “do not commit to evaluations on the spur of the moment”.

The decision made was the trigger for IDEV to lead a process of extensive internal and external consultations, culminating in the submission of a memorandum to the Board of Directors titled: *Conducting A Comprehensive Evaluation Of The African Development Bank: Exploratory Note*.<sup>3</sup> This memorandum presented the scope of the evaluation and further proposed six options to the Committee on Operations and Development Effectiveness (CODE). Thus was conceived the CEDR.

### Narrowing the scope

Lest we get ahead of ourselves, let’s delve deeper into the consultative processes. The Bank had to first look critically at its own context, to help identify what type of evaluation would be most useful to the AfDB at this point in its history as an institution.

At the time of the CEDR inception, the Bank’s specific challenges revolved around its new strategic direction, upcoming events and changes, as well as possible disruption of other important ongoing work. All these needed to be factored into the approach to be taken. Though evaluations look back in time, the CEDR in this case needed to be done such that the lessons gathered could be tailored to help the Bank implement its strategy ►►

► going forward. We will expand more on the upcoming events and changes in the latter part of this article.

So without a strict definition to adhere to, IDEV exploited its freedom to design a comprehensive evaluation that best suited the Bank's and its stakeholders' needs and information requirements. Of course it drew on the experience of other organisations and engagement in the Comprehensive Evaluation Knowledge Sharing Platform<sup>4</sup> to derive the key influencing factors for a successful comprehensive evaluation. It must be also noted that the Bank was not a total novice, it had its own prior experience of conducting a comprehensive evaluation, albeit of smaller magnitude. This was the 2004 evaluation "Stepping up to the future"<sup>5</sup>. Though this evaluation did not look at the developmental results of Bank investments,<sup>6</sup> it covered a period of three African Development Fund (ADF) cycles<sup>7</sup>. So from these reviews, experiences and consultation IDEV distilled three crucial cornerstones of success: usefulness, realism, and the credibility of the process.

- **Usefulness:** The CEDR had to be aligned with future strategic direction such that it coincides with opportunities for major reform (such as a change in leadership and or funding process) and provides timely and relevant information that is responsive to demands from key stakeholders.
- **Realism and/or feasibility:** An evaluability assessment to ensure that there was availability of requisite data, particularly on results, to warrant the exercise. There was need to propose a realistic timeframe,<sup>8</sup> have its scope well circumscribed, and fully embed the CEDR in the wider evaluation work of IDEV to ensure effective coordination and use of resources<sup>9</sup>.

- **Credibility:** This called for the engagement and buy-in of internal and external stakeholders. The governance and independence of the CEDR, having a talented multidisciplinary independent team and lastly the need to follow up.

## From Six Options a Decision is taken

Having set its criteria for assessment, the IDEV team proposed six options. These were:

1. ***Institutional Evaluation*** – the main question this evaluation had to respond to was whether the Bank manages itself and its development assistance efficiently.
2. ***Evaluation of the Bank's Implementation of Reforms (commitments associated with ADF replenishments and General Capital Increase VI)*** – the main question this evaluation had to respond to was whether the Bank had met its external commitments.
3. ***Evaluation of Results Achieved*** – the main question this option sought to address was whether the Bank was achieving its desired results. Crucially, it was also to address the question "If so, why? If not, why not?"
4. ***Two Separate Products: i) Smaller Results Report and ii) Full Evaluation of Commitments and Reforms*** – i) A first report focusing on results would synthesize findings from evaluations conducted in the previous two years – including country, sector and thematic evaluations. ii) A second evaluation would evaluate progress in implementing reforms related to external ADF and GCI commitments. The two products were to be separate. ►►



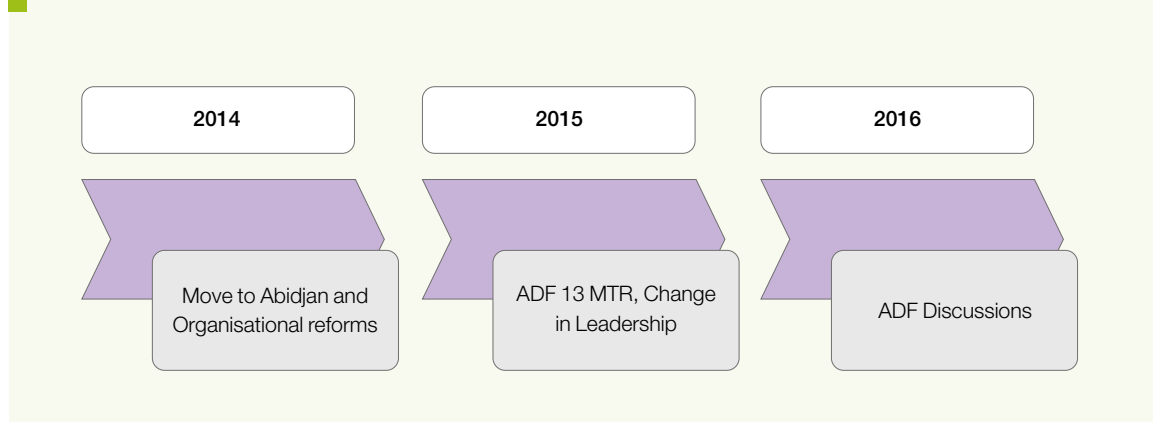


- **5. Two Separate Products: i) Review of Implementation of Commitments and ii) Full Results Evaluation** – This option was to allow IDEV to focus on a comprehensive results focused evaluation, while also delivering a smaller targeted and separate product in time for both the ADF mid-term review and arrival of new Bank leadership. i) IDEV was to provide an independent review of the extent to which reforms related to external commitments had been implemented at mid-term. ii) A full results report was also to be produced, the two were to be separate products.
- 6. Two Separate Products: i) Evaluation of the ADF Replenishment process and ii) Full Results Evaluation** – This option had similar objectives as the previous option, with changes in products. i) With this option, IDEV

was to provide an independent evaluation of the ADF replenishment process in time for the mid-term review. ii) A full results report was also to be produced, the two were to be separate products.

At the end of the deliberations at a CODE meeting,<sup>10</sup> Committee members adopted Option 5 on the grounds that it was the most comprehensive option. It was a hybrid option that focused on commitments and results. Arriving at this choice wasn't all plain sailing, as not all members were convinced of the usefulness and relevance of undertaking a comprehensive evaluation.

To buttress Option 5, CODE recommended that it should be practical, useful and worth the money invested. IDEV was invited to prepare documents<sup>11</sup> on the scope, the time frame, and the cost ►►

**Figure 1:** Context during the conduct of CEDR Evaluation

► of evaluation as well as the implications on its work program. This was to be subsequently discussed, amended and approved. Life had now been breathed into the CEDR – it was a project with defined scope, budget and timeframe.

**Lesson 2: ‘when preparing an options paper do not present too many choices.’**

### The Context of the CEDR

Timing is a crucial factor in ensuring major evaluations have impact. Considering that in addition to a large number of institutional reform processes, the Bank was about to embark on an immense organizational change, one has to recognize that the timing of the CEDR was sensitive. Changes occurring in the environment of AfDB included (see figure 1):

- A. Mid-term and completion of the 13th ADF cycle.
- B. An impending change of Bank leadership was expected in September 2015.
- C. The return to Abidjan from Tunis ensuring that throughout 2014, the Bank would be going through the process of returning to Abidjan, putting pressure on staff including both corporate services and operational teams.
- D. In addition, there were a number of other reviews planned by different sections of the Bank, looking at the organization's processes of particular note was the “*Good to Great*”<sup>12</sup> review commissioned by Bank management to look at the institution's structure and processes, the outcome of which was then not yet clear, but had the potential to lead to significant changes. Even more imminent was the planned mid-term review of the implementation of the decentralization road map (due at end 2013).<sup>13</sup>
- E. IDEV itself needed to revise its work program to ensure it dovetailed with the chosen comprehensive evaluation option. Indeed, other Bank reviews were in the pipeline including a review of regional resource centers, etc. There were a number of ongoing or planned reviews looking at the functioning of the organization and its processes. The existing rolling work program proposed an increased number of country strategy evaluations, in addition to evaluating food security, energy and gender equality. In terms of institutional evaluations, proposals were made to cover decentralization, regional resource centers, procurement, and trust funds, among other themes. ►

## ► Executing the CEDR

Undertaking Option 5 was very challenging. In view of the size and complexity of the CEDR, the entire staff of IDEV was involved in the evaluation. The major concern was to avoid putting additional pressure on Bank staff and management during this already busy time, when the priority was to complete the move to Abidjan with as little disruption to normal operational delivery as possible.

The CEDR process was guided by a panel of senior independent advisors comprised of eminent evaluation and development experts, who also flagged important methodological challenges that the team had to address.

At the design phase, it became clear that the scope of the evaluation was too broad, and as the evaluation progressed, it became increasingly challenging both methodologically and logistically. The IDEV staff had to learn while doing, innovating and iterating, adapting as the evaluation went along. IDEV carried out the various work packages of the assignment in teams with most of the staff involved in more than one team.

Along the way, the options paper had to be revised and new instruments introduced. The newly introduced PRA (Project Results Assessment) was a hugely useful instrument in getting the information during the evaluation. Additionally, many factors appeared, for example some countries that had been selected for the evaluation went into political/civil strife and getting information from these countries became increasingly problematic.

Nevertheless, the IDEV team managed to pull off the exercise with sound determination and irrevocable resilience. The principal driving force was all the IDEV

team pulling together and pushing in the same positive direction. The teamwork was exemplary, with excitement, and seamless working across IDEV divisions.

**Lesson 3: “Where there is a will there is a way. The challenge is inspiring staff to be willing.”**

## The CEDR and IDEV staff

On staff views we will let them speak for themselves. Some IDEV staff were interviewed to share their most profound experience with the entire process. This is what they had to say:

*“My involvement with the synthesis team was challenging given the unfamiliarity with the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method. This was an analysis across the 14 country performance case studies. The method required certain levels of data, some of which had not been collected by some CSPE teams. Delays in producing the country performance case studies put undue pressure on the designated peer reviewers and the synthesis team. In the end IDEV evaluators worked as a team to bring solutions and agree at certain stages on formats and approach to meet deadlines and move forward to achieving goals.”* **Akua ARTHUR-KISSI**

*“It is not common for an organization to have its work evaluated by its peers. During the CEDR, we established quality criteria on the basis of which we assessed our evaluations in order to arrive at a certain standardization of the processes and at a certain level of quality sought. ...The recommendations resulting from these self-assessments were generally well accepted and taken into account by the authors of the evaluations.”* **Michel TANO AKA** ►►



► *“As part of the CEDR work, I conducted two CSPES and was also responsible to report on the general portfolio review. Working on all these was a parallel exercise for me. The workload was extremely heavy, punctuated by field missions. The timeline for delivering the reports was very short – so there was great pressure on time. Nevertheless, sitting under a tree and talking with project beneficiaries to hear their opinion and points of view was always a very rich experience.”*  
**Girma KUMBI**

*“The most interesting was to work with other colleagues, and also to review a number of PRAs in various sectors, with drafting styles ranging from a PRA to another.”*  
**Latefa C. CAMARA**

*“I was requested to peer-review a total of 20 PRA reports in accordance with the “newly-established” quality assurance process established exclusively for the CEDR, while I was overloaded with other urgent assignments at the same time. The deadline was very tight. Due to other urgent (competing) assignments, it was unavoidable for me to work at night-hours as well as during the weekend. The quality assurance process required involving at least two internal peer reviewers*

*per PRA. Given this rule, coordination and communication with other peer reviewer was essential to complete the review work before the deadlines.”*  
**Hajime ONISHI**

*“IDEV had to ensure the quality and conformity of the results of each project level assessment before inclusion in the synthesis. ⅓ of the project evaluations were still expected by April 1st 2016! Still, despite the short delays and pressure our own teams of evaluators worked together to achieve this goal and finally, the deadlines were met.”*  
**Samer HACHEM, Task Manager, CEDR.**

## Conclusion

The CEDR was designed as a synthesis of evaluation studies (building blocks) that were undertaken at country level. Using a purposive sampling strategy, a sample of countries were selected for examination. The objective was to portray a significant share of the Bank’s portfolio and reflect its composition in terms of regions, language, eligibility for various sources of Bank financing, and fragility status, insofar as possible. The final sample of 14 countries<sup>14</sup> represented almost 60% of the Bank’s lending portfolio, based on approvals during 2004–2013. ►►



► Despite a shaky start of the CEDR, IDEV was able to steer the exercise and deliver the CEDR Synthesis Report and 14 CSPE reports on time. By harnessing the strengths of the team, within the limits of the available funds, and mitigating the challenges of the CEDR process, IDEV was able to deliver on its mandate. Team alignment behind a common vision, thrust and shared interest and commitment to do the evaluation made it happen. Creativity,

flexibility to adapt, learning by doing, and experience sharing allowed the whole team to develop its capacity. And the panel of eminent evaluation and development experts concluded its statement giving “the evaluation team credit for delivering credible answers to the strategic questions raised.”

**Final lesson: “it’s all about the people.”**

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## Endnotes

- 1 Further detailed in this issue in the article, “Evaluating ten years of the AfDB in Africa’s development.”
- 2 Recounted by Rakesh Nangia during CEDR retreat 14th July 2017.
- 3 Submitted on the 17th of October 2013.
- 4 The comprehensive evaluation knowledge sharing platform was set up by a group of independent evaluation departments, including all the main IFIs, a number of UN agencies and global funds. The aim is to share knowledge and therefore improve practices.
- 5 Stepping up to the future: an independent evaluation of ADF vii, viii. ix. Despite its title the evaluation did not focus only on ADF funds but issues facing the ADB as a whole.
- 6 Specifically it only covered ADF funds unlike the CEDR which covered both ADF and also ADB funds.
- 7 The concessional window of the African Development Bank (AfDB) Group. The Fund’s resources consist of contributions from internal Bank resources and periodic replenishments by donor countries, usually on a three-year basis.
- 8 Most examples fell in the range of 18 months to 2 years.
- 9 From IDEV’s reviews an average of 1.5 million USD was the cost of such evaluations.
- 10 Held on 29 October 2013.
- 11 Two approach papers, were prepared one for commitments and one for CEDR, as these were two separate evaluations.
- 12 The objective of the assignment being conducted by McKinsey is to “conduct a diagnostic study of the Bank’s business processes and organizational structure...to assess the status and effectiveness of the ongoing reforms and propose a robust adjustment plan with the aim of realigning the Bank’s business processes and organizational structure with its LTS”.
- 13 See Board document “Implementation of the decentralization road map: terms of reference for a mid-term review” ADF/BD/IF/2013/151
- 14 The 14 countries are presented in the article “Evaluating ten years of the AfDB in Africa’s development” in this Issue.

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