



Evaluation as a Driver of Economic Recovery and Long-Term Growth: Patterns and Directions in Africa

Panel discussion hosted by the Operations Evaluation Department during the African Economic Conference 2010: Tunis, Tunisia, 27-29 October, 2010

The objective of the panel was to discuss the links between evaluation and economic development to build a shared understanding of evaluation and why it matters for economic recovery in Africa. Four panelists spoke on the current context, on theoretical and empirical evaluation results, and drew conclusions for strengthening the role of evaluation in economic development in Africa.

Key Messages from the Presentations and Discussion

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Why do some poor countries succeed in fostering strong growth and eradicating poverty, while others don't?

- Countries that registered strong growth with significant impact on poverty reduction have been led by good policies, or by great men.

During the last two decades, have donors, in particular multilateral development banks, used lessons learned from evaluations of their operations to improve Africa's performance?”



Colin Kirk and Aloysius Ordu

--Aloysius Ordu, VP, Country and Regional Programmes and Policy, African Development Bank

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Evaluation evidence can help African leaders and decision-makers to make a difference; but this is not happening because evidence is scarce and relevant evaluation and policy research is in short supply. “

-- Colin Kirk, Director, Operations Evaluation Department, African Development Bank

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1. The Political Economy of Evaluation: the Aid Effectiveness Agenda and

Recent Developments in Evaluation: *Benoit Chevalier, DG Tresor, France*

Official development assistance has been rising steadily since the Monterrey Consensus in 2000 despite recent budgetary pressures in OECD countries. This underscores the need for greater accountability and to show that aid helps poor people in order to justify additional resources. This implies a greater role for evaluation in demonstrating value for money, efficiency, and results of aid expenditure. National parliaments have recognized this role and are taking greater interest in evaluation as a tool for decision support. However, evaluation is only one factor among others that can serve the decision-maker. On its own, it cannot provide all the answers, as attribution and causality are sometimes difficult to prove.



Benoit Chevalier:
Accountability matters

Guy-Blaise Nkamleu:
The Bank is doing the right thing, but not necessarily in the right way

2. Improving Effectiveness in Agriculture and Rural Development in Africa:

Lessons Learned from Evaluations: *Guy-Blaise Nkamleu, AfDB*

The Bank's activities in support of agriculture and rural development comprise lending, analytical work, and policy advice. An analysis of AfDB's agricultural evaluations undertaken in the period 2001 – 2010 provides the following lessons for the sector:

- Nearly all AfDB interventions in the agriculture sector are relevant to the needs of regional member countries; and positive results have been observed in livestock breeding, and irrigation and rural infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, allocations to the sector have been declining—from 32% in 1995 to 10% in 2006.

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- Too often, the project designs are poor: with ambitious objectives, unclear or complex design logic, and multiple project components addressing several dimensions of poverty and institutional arrangements. There is a “one design fits all” mentality
- Projects also suffer from chronic late starts, coordination problems with so many project components, implementation time overruns, and poor exit strategies.
- This makes sustainability a concern in many agriculture projects. Of the 27 projects investigated in the recent joint AfDB/IFAD evaluation, about 65 percent were reported unsustainable. Issues identified included lack of country ownership, unclear responsibilities for maintenance of project facilities (especially infrastructure), inadequate transfer of technical skills to beneficiaries, fragility of grass-roots institutions, inadequate authority of local management units, and lack of post-project maintenance funds.
- Many evaluations reported the repeated recurrence of many mistakes, indicating that agricultural projects were not learning from experience.
- In conclusion, the AfDB is doing the right thing in the agriculture sector - but not necessarily doing things right. Better project designs, stronger government leadership and increased national capacities are critical areas for action.

3. Human Capital Development in Africa: Lessons Learned from Evaluations:

Eneas Gakusi, AfDB

Education and other aspects of human capital have substantial effects at micro-economic and macro-economic levels as well as on reproductive behavior. Education financing by African governments is very inadequate and most African governments rely on international aid for sustaining the education sector.

OPEV cases studies for the evaluation of the education sector have reported that in several countries, international assistance represents as much as 50 percent of the education financing (Benin 50.4 for 1996-2006; 50.0 Mozambique in 2004). There is a similar pattern in the health sector.

The case studies further highlight that aid in these sectors is characterized by weak country ownership, compounded by problems related to incoherence and inconsistency in international assistance. If these issues were addressed, resources could be more efficiently and effectively deployed.

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4. Making Evaluation Matter for Africa's Development: Colin Kirk, AfDB

So does evaluation matter for Africa's development? Can it make a contribution to Africa's recovery and growth?

Empirically, evaluation shows what works – and what does not work. If Africa is to resume a path of sustainable, long term growth, Africa's decision makers need to know what is effective, and what needs to be improved, both for policy and for operations.

Analytically, evaluation can bring rigor to policy and planning. Systematic evaluation can examine the assumptions underpinning development initiatives, and assess their relevance, clarity and coherence. In strengthening the logic of development efforts, evaluation can perhaps claim to be a “driver of economic recovery and growth”.

Politically, presenting positive evaluations results can play a role in persuading decision-makers to support an initiative or invest in a country.

So why is evaluation not driving Africa's economic recovery and growth? Good policy and good governance are two sides of the same coin; evaluation can only flourish in an open and rules-driven environment. This creates an opportunity for relevant policy research and evaluation to make a difference.

But there is a further hurdle to cross. Capacity constraints inhibit both the demand and the supply of quality evaluation. Efforts are currently being made to establish a network of support for evaluation and evaluation capacity development across the region. Such initiatives, rooted in African institutions, will help to make evaluation matter for Africa.

Conclusion

“Those who do not learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them”.

A number of countries have paid heed to good policies. Examples include Ghana, Rwanda, Botswana, and other countries in East and West Africa. They are now resuming a high growth path.

Learning from their experience will help other countries in the region lay down the foundations for long term growth. Evaluation can accelerate the learning process and pave the way towards successful development.

The panelists' papers and presentations are available online at www.afdb.org/opev

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