SUMMARY

Independent Evaluation Department
Self-Evaluation 2022: Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations
Foreword

The self-evaluation was initiated by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED), Asian Development Bank (ADB) to find ways to further strengthen the quality, influence, and culture of IED and inform its strategic directions for 2022–2026. The self-evaluation was based on systematic consultations with stakeholders in ADB and with IED staff. It followed a series of regular self-evaluations and external assessments of the evaluation function carried out over the last 15 years.

The exercise took place from August to mid-November in close collaboration with the IED internal self-evaluation team: Benjamin Graham (chair), Maya Vijayaraghavan, Erik Bloom, Garrett Kilroy, and Renato Lumain, with administrative support from Karina Marquez and Mayvellene Montejo.

I would like to thank IED for engaging me for this assignment. That IED regularly evaluates itself to improve its performance is a sign of exemplary quality and learning orientation. I appreciated the pleasant and stimulating interaction with all the interviewees, with IED staff, with IED’s senior management, and particularly with the IED self-evaluation team.

Oslo, November 2022

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Main Findings and Recommendations

1. The document summarizes the five main findings, followed by five recommendations. The findings should be read as perceptions and views of the interviewees, not as representative findings for everyone in IED’s stakeholder groups.

Findings

A Respected Evaluation Department with Potential for Greater Influence

2. The strengths of the Independent Evaluation Department (IED), the expertise of its staff, and the capability of its management were recognized by the interviewed stakeholders. Even though weaknesses were identified, respondents highlighted IED’s independence, the outlook across the Asian Development Bank (ADB), IED’s network with evaluation departments of other organizations, and IED’s ability to provide numerous timely and relevant evaluative inputs. The interviewees broadly agreed that IED provided a lot of relevant and practical findings and recommendations.

3. The interviewees perceived IED as having the greatest influence on the Board of Directors, less on Management and operations, and the least on developing member countries (DMCs). IED has the potential to increase its influence among all three stakeholder groups.

Inadequate Consultation Limiting the Perception of Credibility

4. Rigorous evidence, sector and context knowledge, understanding of how operations work, and the level of interaction and consultation with Management and operations throughout the evaluation process were perceived by respondents as key for credibility.

5. Almost all the interviewees called for better dialogue and closer interaction with IED in all evaluation phases, from writing the approach paper to formulating recommendations. They believed that improved interaction would lead to more credible evaluations and better recommendations.

Possibility for Better Communication and Use of Evaluation Knowledge

6. The respondents all thought that IED needed to communicate better and interact more with the Board and Management, in formal meetings and informally between meetings. IED has a wealth of knowledge, not only from its own evaluations but also from its networks of evaluation departments in other organizations. This knowledge can be synthesized and disseminated better through different means. The respondents thought IED should more clearly identify the potential for replication of successful interventions.

Concerns about Quality and Relevance of Evaluation Work

7. Concerns about the quality and relevance of IED’s work came up in several interviews. One interviewee said that the impression was that keeping deadlines was more important than quality. On the innovative real-time evaluation (RTE) of ADB’s response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis, views were mixed.
8. Several interviewees expressed opinions about IED’s recommendations. While a few hinted that they could possibly be dropped from evaluation reports, several others clearly stated that recommendations were needed. Many respondents said that closer dialogue between IED and Management on the recommendations would lead to a better understanding of Management’s reservations and concerns.

9. Many from Management said that IED had too much on its plate, leading to a standardized way of doing thematic and sector evaluations where the evaluation approach and methodology were not always tailored to the evaluation questions. A common view among respondents was that IED’s influence was not dependent on volume of work but rather on quality and relevance.

**ADB’s Rule-Based Orientation Seemingly a Barrier to an Open Learning Culture**

10. A formal, rules-based work orientation was among the challenges identified by many respondents at different levels in ADB generally and in IED. Several interviewees said the silo culture should be broken and a culture of learning from mistakes nurtured throughout the bank. A challenge, some said, was limited critical thinking in Management. Another was improving the understanding of DMCs’ needs. Many said IED had the potential to play an important role in addressing these challenges.

11. IED staff identified positive and negative aspects of IED’s culture. Staff competency, diversity of skills, experienced management and good team spirit were considered the most positive.

**Recommendations**

12. Five recommendations are made to strengthen IED’s quality, influence, and culture.

**Recommendation 1: Increase interaction to strengthen influence**

Improve IED’s influence by increasing interaction and closely partnering with the Board, ADB departments, resident missions, and DMCs by, among other things, initiating

(i) systematic briefings and regular follow-up of each Board constituency’s new and existing board members by the IED director general and deputy director general;

(ii) ways to strengthen relationships, share knowledge, and increase formal and informal interaction with ADB departments at all staff levels, not only related to specific evaluations; and

(iii) joint workshops and exchange on evaluation findings with staff at headquarters and in DMCs (beyond “what works” and other dissemination activities).
**Recommendation 2: Improve consultation to improve credibility**

Sharpen IED’s sector knowledge, context understanding, and operational insight by, among other things,

(i) increasing attention to project team composition to match the evaluation topics and staff (and consultant) skills,
(ii) broadening stakeholder consultation by developing plans for interaction and engagement for all major evaluation products;
(iii) initiating short-term staff exchange with regional departments; and
(iv) improving the content and use of IED’s skills directory.

**Recommendation 3: Strengthen the knowledge management function**

Increase dissemination, communication, and use of IED’s knowledge by, among other things,

(i) developing a plan for external communication for IED with stakeholder analysis and a plan for how and what should be communicated to whom;
(ii) continuing to expand existing means for communication (written, digital, in-person events, and so on), targeting each stakeholder group (the Board, ADB staff, DMCs), by considering experience from previous efforts (following the 2017 self-evaluation);
(iii) continuing to prepare synthesis reports and other knowledge products on relevant issues (such as policy-based lending); and
(iv) initiating joint knowledge products with selected ADB departments.

**Recommendation 4: Improve quality and relevance of evaluations**

Continue efforts to strengthen the quality of IED’s evaluations by taking steps internally and in IED interactions with partners by, among other things,

(i) continuing to pursue the recommendations of the 2017 self-evaluation and the 2018 external review: (a) strengthen IED’s (1) quality assurance systems (including building a network of external evaluation advisers); (2) systematic training of staff on all aspects of evaluation work (evaluation methodology, project management, messaging, and so on); and (3) testing of new evaluation approaches and methods (for instance, doing RTE on climate change and ADB’s reorganization); (b) adequately resource the methods adviser function; (c) supplement the department with new skills (such as data analysts); and (d) continue to modify the management action record system;
(ii) updating guidelines to ensure rigor and relevance (on project validation, country partnership strategy final review validations, and so on) and initiating joint training with selected departments;
(iii) considering expanding the variance memo\(^1\) with explanation of the trends in the gap between self- and independent evaluation
(iv) strengthening the interaction with the international evaluation community at the department and individual levels through short-term secondments, conference paper presentations, and so on; and

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\(^1\) The variance memo provides information on the gap between self- and independent evaluation
(v) carefully considering the volume of the work program (for instance, reducing the number of thematic evaluations) and the scope of each evaluation, and paying more attention to what each evaluation will feed into and how the timing aligns with Management’s timelines.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen the learning culture

Continue strengthening the learning culture by, among other things,

(i) enhancing efforts to support evaluative thinking, reflection and learning at all levels in ADB
(ii) developing an IED internal communication plan to make sure all staff groups get all the important information and have the same understanding of the work processes,
(iii) developing and implementing an annual plan for formal and informal team building in IED,
(iv) improving project management skills and management of teams and workloads, and
(v) increasing recognition and reward of contributions of all team members.