

# ExPost

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Authors Jean-Martial BONIS CHARANCLE,  
Martin VIELAJUS, Pauline SIMON



## Evaluation of AFD's Evaluation Policy

The full evaluation report can be downloaded from the AFD website: <https://www.afd.fr/en/ressources-accueil>

**Coordinated by**

Karen Rousseau and Sabrina Guerard (AFD).

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**Cover page**

Abobo legal clinic, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire),

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# Executive summary

The objective of this evaluation was to determine whether AFD's evaluation system met the objectives set out in its 2013 evaluation policy and whether evaluations ultimately proved "useful." The aim was also to reflect on possible directions for a new evaluation policy, which would take into account the changing expectations and needs in the evaluation field. AFD's Evaluation Committee (COMEVA) has acted as the contracting authority for this evaluation.

## **What is evaluation contributing to accountability requirements?**

The issue of ODA accountability is becoming increasingly important. It is certainly a concern for AFD (given the rapid expansion of funds managed by AFD from 3.4 billion euros in 2007 to 14 billion in 2020). Expectations have grown stronger that evaluations should deliver systematic feedback on results, demonstrate the impact of strategic interventions, and the coherence of AFD's interventions with its international and national commitments. However,

- In order to provide systematic information on results, we have found that the evaluations, which are largely qualitative and non-systematic, cannot meet that demand alone, as they are one link in a chain that also includes processes related to results monitoring, which are often still rather limited at AFD.
- Regarding the requirements for the demonstration of the impacts of strategic interventions, our finding is that AFD has taken stock of this demand in recent years, as it has expanded the team in charge of impact evaluations within the Evaluation Department (EVA) and explored new methods.
- Finally, concerning the need for information and analysis on the coherence of the interventions with high-level political commitments, this is a largely undeveloped field that will have to be further developed.

## **How useful are the evaluations for informing action and decision making?**

Greater use could be made of evaluations within AFD to drive action and decision making. One obstacle identified is that the evaluations often come too late to feed decision making processes. For AFD's governing bodies (its Executive Management and Board of Directors), the evaluation process helps ensure the quality of work, yet remains rarely referenced and has little influence on strategic decision making. Recognizing that the usefulness of evaluations is related to stakeholders' involvement, the study makes recommendations related to participation in evaluations' processes.

- Programming of evaluations and monitoring of recommendations should be more strategic and concerted, and should integrate, at appropriate levels, AFD's Executive Management, Board of Directors, AFD supervisory ministries, counterparts (i.e., the organizations/institutions responsible for the projects funded by AFD), as well as AFD staff.
- Involving AFD's counterparts in the evaluations appears as a major issue in the promotion of a "shared accountability" principle between AFD and its counterparts. Putting counterparts at the forefront of design and management of certain evaluations could contribute to further promoting dialogue on public policies.

### **What is the level of quality achieved by the evaluations?**

The quality of evaluations is largely determined in the upstream stages, through developing clear and focused evaluations questions, and ensuring the evaluability of interventions (clear intervention logic, baseline, precise indicators, etc.). Regarding the first point, evaluation work has tended to be built upon the framework developed by OECD DAC (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee). Nevertheless, we observe a shift towards focusing evaluations on a limited set of questions and criteria in recent years. The evaluability of interventions remains one of the main shortcomings highlighted by many of the evaluations we have reviewed.

### **What roles and resources for the EVA Department?**

Over the years, EVA (the AFD department in charge of evaluation) has diversified the types of evaluation it carries out, has increased support for decentralized evaluations, has explored the field of impact evaluation, and has advanced AFD's evaluation culture. Taking on new duties, diversifying evaluations and promoting quality improvements in evaluations explain the increase in financial and human resources of the department, in spite of a certain stability in the number of evaluations conducted up to 2020. Nevertheless, given the growing amount of the funding managed by AFD, having even more resources allocated to evaluation could make sense.

In summary, we would like to emphasize that the new evaluation policy would benefit from a parallel reflection on the improvement of AFD's results monitoring system, a redefinition of the relationship between AFD and its counterparts in terms of evaluation, and a more strategic and concerted approach to monitoring and evaluation within AFD. The role of the future Independent Evaluation Commission, announced in the 2021 "Law for solidarity development and the fight against global inequalities", must also be considered to optimize complementarity.

# 1. Key facts on evaluation at AFD

**In 2013, AFD adopted an evaluation policy that has since served as a framework for its evaluation practices. The present study forms an evaluation of this policy.** The main purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether the system established by AFD has met the objectives set out in its evaluation policy and whether the past evaluations were ultimately “useful.” The aim is also to reflect on future directions that must be built into a new evaluation policy, taking into account the changing expectations and practices in the field of evaluation.

AFD’s Evaluation Committee (COMEVA) acted as the contracting authority for this evaluation and has ensured its independence. The evaluation covers the **2007–2020 period** (i.e., before and after the evaluation policy was adopted), and the whole range of evaluations undertaken. It examines multiple data sources, using, in a complementary way, the results of:

- a quantitative review of evaluation at AFD over the 2007–2020 period;
- an online survey of internal and external respondents, which received more than 470 responses;
- approximately one hundred interviews conducted within AFD and with key stakeholders from within its environment;
- the review of a sample of 30 evaluations conducted in the 2007–2020 period;
- the examination of documentation from AFD and the evaluation sector.

Before presenting the main findings and the associated recommendations, the study highlights key points related to evaluation at AFD, its organization, and the evaluations conducted.

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## 1.1 How evaluation is organized

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The current AFD’s evaluation policy started to be discussed in 2007 and was drafted between 2011 and 2013. It reflects the debates that existed during that time, in particular the balance between the objectives assigned to evaluation (accountability, improving action, producing knowledge), the diversification of evaluation exercises, the number of evaluations to be carried out, or the positioning of the EVA Department. The policy served mostly to clarify the scope of evaluation at AFD, its objectives and to uphold existing evaluation practices. It set few measurable objectives and was not further outlined in the form of a roadmap or an action plan.

The EVA Department (EVA) is in charge of evaluation at AFD. It has been located within the Innovation, Research, and Knowledge (IRS) Directorate since 2006. This position within the IRS Directorate reveals the desire not to position evaluations as an exercise of control, and to maintain a certain level of independence with the operational teams.

AFD’s evaluation governance brings together the Board of Directors, AFD Executive Management, COMEVA, and the Observatory of the French National Council for Development and International Solidarity (CNDSI). COMEVA, whose members are appointed by the Board of Directors, was created in October 2009 to “support AFD in the fulfillment of its mission to be accountable and evaluate its actions in an independent and transparent manner.” The programming of evaluations is submitted for opinion to COMEVA and the Observatory of the CNDSI, presented to the Board of Directors, and then approved by AFD Executive Management.

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## 1.2 The evaluations conducted

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**A total of 490 evaluations have been conducted since 2007**, on Operations Directorate (DOE) projects. A strong increase occurred between 2008 and 2010, before leveling off in 2011 (with an average of 30 to 40 evaluations per year).

**AFD has developed a diverse range of evaluation exercises.** The diversity of evaluation approaches is, in fact, higher at AFD than at



many other public donors in the aid sector. In the last few years, this diversification of formats and methodologies has been an important driver, as opposed to simply pushing for an increase in the number of evaluations. The diagram below illustrates the distribution of evaluations at AFD over the 2007–2020 period.

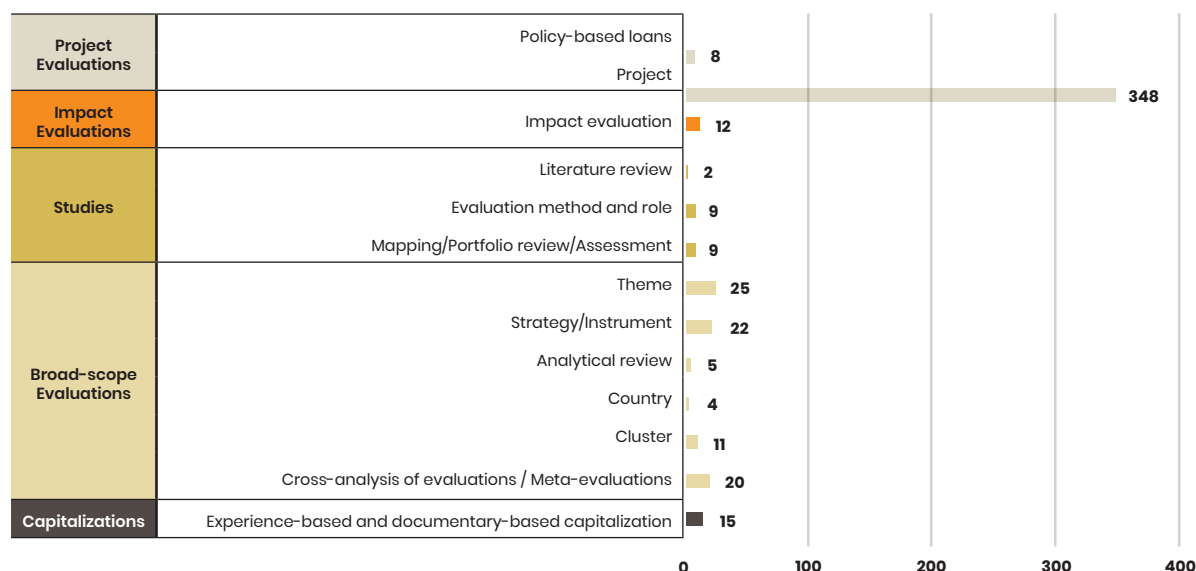
**Project evaluations represent the large majority of the evaluations conducted (73%).**

Most of them are decentralized at the AFD country offices level, and are driven at this level, even though EVA supports them throughout most steps.

**The effort level (i.e., the percentage of projects being evaluated) has been relatively constant since 2015, at 40–45%** (compared with a 50% objective announced in the 2014–2016 AFD's Resources and Objectives Contract [MOC]). This evaluation effort can vary by a factor of two depending on the technical sector or geographical area concerned.

An acceleration or “catching up” of the evaluation effort can be observed in recent years on interventions that are strategic for AFD, such as policy-based loans (PBLs), 59% of which were evaluated in the 2013–2020 period. A significant evaluation effort is also observed in strategic regions (including the Greater Sahel region, with a specific objective of 75% of projects undergoing evaluation, as announced in the IRS Directorate's 2019–2022 strategy).

Diagram 1 – A breakdown of the evaluations conducted at AFD (2007–2020).



Source: Kayros, based on data provided by AFD.

## 2. Key findings

The findings of this evaluation are organized into four key areas:

- the capacity for evaluation to meet the increased demand for accountability;
- the usefulness of evaluation in informing and improving decision making and action;
- the quality of evaluations;
- the coordination, management and the resources for evaluation.

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### 2.1 Evaluations in a time of increasing demands for accountability

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The question of the place and nature of evaluation at AFD is topical given the rapid expansion of funds managed by AFD (which increased from 3.4 billion euros in 2007 to 8 billion in 2016, and to 14 billion in 2020). The 2013 evaluation policy was developed as AFD was growing into a major player of the French ODA.

The growing consideration given to accountability is reflected, for example, in the creation of an Independent Evaluation Commission for French development assistance—as suggested in the 2018 Berville report on the modernization of partnership policy in the development field.<sup>[1]</sup> This step-up in the issue of ODA accountability result in higher expectations for evaluation, but also for all processes that contribute to accountability.

“Accountability” covers three fairly distinct sets of expectations, namely:

- access to systematic aggregated data on the proper use of funds and the immediate results of interventions;
- access to more in-depth information on the impact of certain strategic, large-scale, or particularly innovative interventions;
- access to consolidated information on the coherence of interventions with the high-level political and strategic commitments taken by AFD and its supervisory ministries.

We observed that the ability of evaluation to meet these demands is highly variable and that a series of cultural and organizational challenges interferes with them.

#### **2.1.1 – Evaluations are in a “poor position” to meet the demand for systematic information on the immediate results of interventions**

The first demand, in terms of accountability, concerns the access to systematic and aggregated data on intervention results. However, we found that evaluations were currently in a “poor position” to meet this demand in a systematic way. Evaluations are largely qualitative, and roughly half of the projects are evaluated, therefore producing an incomplete response. Evaluations are, in fact, part of a continuum (which also includes the entire results monitoring process), and it is necessary to specify the contribution of evaluation to this continuum.

A large part of the response to the demand for access to systematic and aggregated information on intervention results is to be found in the upstream stages preceding the evaluations—in systematically establishing robust monitoring mechanisms for interventions and in the ability of these mechanisms to be results-oriented (not just input-oriented). Our findings suggest that these mechanisms currently remain quite weak, in their capacity to define robust frameworks for objectives and indicators, in their capacity to establish documented baselines, and to collect data throughout the interventions.

Efforts have been made to support AFD staff and counterparts (i.e., the organizations responsible for AFD-funded projects) to put monitoring systems in place. However, the challenge now is about achieving a greater recognition for monitoring as a key activity within the project cycle. The current lack of recognition is reflected in the observation that there is a certain degree of uncertainty internally regarding who can support the operational teams in developing and running more robust projects monitoring systems.

[1] Modernisation de la politique partenariale de développement – <https://www.gouvernement.fr/partage/10475-rapport-d-herve-berville-sur-la-modernisation-de-la-politique-partenarial-de-developpement>



### 2.1.2 – An effort in terms of measuring the impact of strategic interventions

Given the demand for in-depth information on the impact of strategic interventions, impact evaluation has a key role to play. Impact evaluations can indeed provide information and data on the causal relationships between interventions and their impacts (even though they require a certain level of hindsight and therefore remain difficult to connect with policy agendas).

Our finding is that AFD has taken stock of this demand in recent years, as it has expanded the team in charge of impact evaluations within the Evaluation Department (EVA) and has explored new impact evaluation methods. In our opinion, this widening of scope is a good thing and should now focus on the exploration of new methodologies, beyond the counterfactual methods, which would help open impact analysis to a larger pool of interventions.

### 2.1.3 – The challenge of demonstrating the coherence of AFD interventions with its high-level policy and strategy commitments

The third expectation in terms of accountability concerns the need for consolidated information related to the coherence of interventions with the high-level policy commitments of AFD and its supervisory ministries. This expectation is clearly expressed by the supervisory ministries and Members of Parliament and is also a growing concern of AFD's governing bodies (Boards of Director, Executive Management). Coherence relates directly to how interventions align with (i) the frameworks defined by AFD itself (corporate mission, Strategic Orientation Plan, Sectoral Intervention Framework, Cross-cutting Intervention Framework, etc.), (ii) the policy guidelines set out by the supervisory ministries, and (iii) France's major international commitments (Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], Paris Climate Agreement, etc.).

In a time for increasing demands for accountability, our finding is that, overall, AFD has increased its effort, particularly through:

- developing an accountability framework (revamping aggregated indicators across projects, sectors, and geographies; training accountability focal points; objective set at 50% of projects undergoing evaluation; etc.);
- producing and disseminating accountability outputs (an annual report drafted with the respective evaluation departments of the supervisory ministries, a biennial report on AFD's evaluations, the uploading on the AFD website of evaluations reports or summaries, as well as reports on indicators that aggregate across projects, sectors, and geographies, etc.);
- exploring approaches that contribute to accountability (the development and expansion of impact evaluations, the development of "cluster" evaluations, etc.).

A framework is therefore emerging in order to meet the demand for accountability. The challenge lies in its practical application and in the remediation of a series of shortcomings or weaknesses—though these weaknesses aren't all dependent on evaluation.

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## 2.2 Evaluation's usefulness in improving action and decision making

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**One of the greatest challenges for evaluation lies in its ability to influence decision-making and management to ultimately improve action.** Given the finding that evaluation is most useful to those that actively participate in it, the involvement of the various parties concerned with the evaluations is a central issue that must be considered at all stages of the evaluation cycle: programming, implementation, and follow-up of their recommendations as well.

The general view shared by many respondents, regardless of their profile, is that AFD's evaluations have little influence on improving and driving action or decision making. The risk that is put forward is that time and energy might be mobilized internally on exercises that have limited impact on interventions and strategies. The challenge for AFD is therefore to increase the willingness of projects stakeholders to get involved in the evaluation processes, and to address the barriers that limit availability.

We present five findings regarding evaluation governance and stakeholder engagement (stakeholders include among others AFD governing bodies, supervisory ministries, operational teams, and counterparts).

### **2.2.1 – Evaluation programming: an exercise insufficiently strategic and concerted**

For AFD governing bodies (the Executive Management and the Board of Directors), evaluation currently remains first and foremost a reassurance mechanism, due to its very existence. Though it yields little influence on strategic decision making, it helps ensure the quality of work. This finding calls for an improvement in the overall visibility of the most strategic evaluations to the Executive Management and the Board of Directors. A greater involvement of these bodies in guiding evaluation programming would respond to this visibility challenge.

More generally, evaluation programming continues to be handled with too little strategic intent and the level of consultation with other parties that could benefit from evaluations (supervisory ministries, operational teams, and counterparts) is too low. A more strategic approach to evaluation programming and broader stakeholder involvement would be needed to ensure greater ownership of evaluations by all stakeholders.

Furthermore, the usefulness of evaluations is optimized when they are conducted at the right time and formatted to inform projects management and assist with decision making. Our finding, however, is that the evaluations (and in particular project evaluations) often come too late in the process compared to the timeline of decision making. AFD's efforts to shorten the time between the completion of operations and evaluation, have gradually contributed to making evaluations more directly useful to improving action. However this shortened time frame doesn't solve everything. Evaluation programming is still largely dominated by the ex-post evaluation model and still doesn't sufficiently explore the various possible formats and timings (midterm evaluations, evaluations during the last year of the project, etc.) that could be applied depending on the objectives pursued.

### **2.2.2 – A lack of follow-up on evaluation recommendations that undermines the usefulness of evaluations**

A purpose of evaluation is to make recommendations to improve interventions. These recommendations aren't binding; however, it is necessary to monitor how they are received, and how those that have been selected are implemented.

Our finding is that the stakeholders that could derive the most benefit from evaluations (operational teams, contracting authorities, governing bodies) are rarely involved in responding to recommendations, or in following how they are put into action. Internally, this lack of follow-up is seen as one of the reasons for the insufficient influence of evaluations on projects' design and funding decisions.

One of the explanations often given for this shortcoming is the substantial expansion of AFD's sectoral and geographic coverage over the past decade, which has led to frequent "discontinuity" in the actions undertaken. Another explanatory factor is the predominance of a "disbursement culture" within AFD, with more attention given to project appraisal than to the analysis of ongoing or completed interventions. To address this situation, AFD faces a challenge that is both cultural and organizational.

### **2.2.3 – The perception of evaluations by operational teams: closing the gap**

We have observed a certain "distancing" of operational teams from evaluation and the role it can play for them (this distance being more pronounced within AFD country offices staff than within headquarters staff).

Nevertheless, the interest in evaluation is rising overall, thanks to the ties developed between EVA and other departments and operational teams, to a more substantial involvement of EVA in decentralized evaluations, and to an increasingly close coordination with DOE on evaluation programming.

It must be noted that this shift has hit a "glass ceiling" in recent years, due to the very perception within AFD that evaluation must avoid being a burdensome constraint for operational teams. It is therefore still a challenge to advance

evaluation culture with operational teams and to obtain a greater involvement of these teams in evaluations.

#### **2.2.4 – Counterparts and their role in evaluation: an ideal of “shared accountability” that is difficult to achieve**

AFD's current position is to consider its counterparts as “accountability partners,” and to treat evaluations as opportunities for dialogue. This should logically lead to the co-design of evaluations and the co-management of evaluation's processes. This appears even more logical given that the data concerning the results of the interventions isn't, for the most part, under the control of AFD. The counterparts are the front line of the data collection regarding projects.

Our finding is that national stakeholders, and, first and foremost, the counterparts, are not very involved in the evaluation processes set up by AFD and that they most often perceive these evaluations as being of little use for them. Decentralized evaluations are a good example. They provide an opportunity for dialogue between counterparts and AFD about intervention results. However, this dialogue often has had difficulty emerging.

This observation must be qualified. AFD country offices and the EVA Department have worked hard to bolster the involvement of AFD counterparts in the management of evaluations. In crisis areas, AFD strong focus on evaluation has come with more involvement of counterparts, and often a strengthened dialogue around evaluations. However, as AFD is emphasizing its role as a platform and the position of counterparts as “accountability partners,” it remains to be seen how AFD counterparts can take greater ownership of the evaluations.

#### **2.2.5 – Links with the other public institutions involved in ODA: coordination must be bolstered**

The coordination of the evaluation of French ODA involves AFD's supervisory ministries (the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs [MEAE], the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance

[MEAF], and the Ministry of the Overseas [MO]). Depending of the projects, various departments in these ministries are interested in the evaluations carried out by AFD. Each of the supervisory ministry also has its own evaluation unit, with established links with AFD's evaluation unit.

A series of information channels and products exist to report on AFD's evaluation activities: the annual note to the Board of Directors and the Observatory of the CNDSI, which presents an overview of the evaluations conducted during the year and the planning for the years to come; the biennial report prepared jointly by the evaluation units of MEAE, MEAF and AFD for the Members of Parliament. In spite of this existing products, we observe a desire (from the supervisory ministries) to establish closer ties with the evaluation activities conducted at AFD. This involves a demand for more in-depth information on the evaluations and the activities of the EVA Department, a request for higher involvement in strategic evaluations, a proposal to develop joint evaluations, and a demand for increased sharing between evaluation units on tools and methods.

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### **2.3 Evaluation quality**

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The survey and the interviews give a medium range appreciation of the quality of evaluations, the most critical respondents being AFD staff. Three primary drivers of evaluation quality were identified by respondents: (i) the evaluation framework, (ii) the evaluability of the interventions, and (iii) the level of analysis and the actionability of recommendations.

#### **2.3.1 – Evaluations are becoming more focused**

The evaluation frameworks, the clarity of the terms of reference (ToR), their scope, and their evaluation questions are all perceived by the respondents of this evaluation as being a primary driver of evaluation quality.

Most of the evaluations that were assessed (mostly project evaluations, but also other types) were built around the OECD DAC criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability), typically considering all these criteria and weighting them all quite similarly. This comprehensive, balanced consideration of the evaluation criteria often leads to a superficial analysis of each of them.

However, a shift towards considering the DAC criteria as a guideline and developing focused and contextualized evaluation questions is noticeable in recent years. This is apparent in the ToRs of the latest project evaluations. This shift has to do with the remodeling of the standard ToR template, but also, and more importantly, with the time spent by EVA to support agencies and technical divisions in drafting the ToRs (in particular in developing the evaluation questions).

### **2.3.2 – Evaluability remains problematic**

Most of the evaluations reviewed mention that they have faced a difficulty related to the “evaluability” of interventions (i.e., their readiness for evaluation—which would require a clear intervention logic, a well-established baseline, precise and realistic indicators, data related to the indicators, etc.). Almost half of evaluation reports reviewed call attention to the issue of the evaluability of the intervention or the strategy being evaluated.

The lack of data is viewed internally as one of the main shortcomings of many of the evaluations. The difficulty for evaluations to take stock of the interventions and to pass judgment therefore comes in part from the upstream stages—from inadequate formalization of intervention logics and weakness of the monitoring mechanisms.

Weak focus on setting up monitoring systems during the appraisal and launch phases, combined with low capacity for data collection in subsequent phases of interventions, result in low evaluability. However, efforts have been made by AFD to support teams and counterparts in establishing more robust monitoring frameworks, particularly in areas considered strategic by AFD, like the Sahel region.

### **2.3.3 – Critical analysis and recommendations need to improve in quality**

The survey and the review of the evaluations sample converge on the fact that many evaluations remain too descriptive and aren't up to standards in terms of both the critical analysis and the quality of the recommendations. Among the explanations is AFD's frequent emphasis on having evaluators reconstruct the intervention logic and history, at the expense of the rest of their work.

This expectation that evaluation should play a descriptive function has to do with the project completion reports (PCRs) not being produced as regularly as they should. If this memory and review exercise is missing, it is only logical that evaluations are asked to fill in the gap left by the lack of final reporting, at the expense of the evaluations' quality. Since 2018, a catch-up effort has been launched and the percentage of projects with a PCR has increased. This should free the evaluations from that descriptive role. Instead of filling the void for missing PCR, evaluations would be able to build on them,

In addition, some of the recommendations made by the evaluations are perceived as being imprecise, unactionable, or parachuted. Evaluators' capacities, unclear evaluation questions, and a lack of space for the co-construction of recommendations are only a few of the many different factors accounting for this observed difficulty in producing recommendations that are conducive to change. We observed that, in order to address this deficiency, the co-construction of recommendations has become a more regular fixture of evaluation's processes in recent years.

## 2.4 Coordination, management, and resources for evaluation

Evaluation coordination and management cuts across all of the above challenges. In this section, we look more precisely at the roles of the EVA Department and COMEVA, and at the issue of the financial and human resources made available for evaluation.

### 2.4.1 – The Evaluation Committee's steering role seems to be weakening

COMEVA was created in October 2009 to "support AFD in the fulfillment of its mission to be accountable and evaluate its actions in an independent and transparent manner." COMEVA's role seems less clear than in 2013, however, and its responsibilities seem to have been watered down. One of the initial objectives was to have an authority capable of promoting evaluation at the Board of Directors level. Access to the Board of Directors has increased and the issue now appears less critical. At the same time, COMEVA doesn't seem to be playing a pivotal role in terms of the monitoring of evaluation quality or in the programming of evaluations.

Maintaining this structure, which is currently being called into question, doesn't seem to be possible without redefining its composition and mandate. This will have to be addressed during the preparation of AFD's new evaluation policy. The contours and responsibilities of the future Independent Evaluation Commission will also have to be considered.

### 2.4.2 – Substantial changes in EVA's mandate and resources

The EVA Department has pursued a strategy built around four main lines of action over the past years: diversifying, exploring, supporting, and connecting. EVA has diversified the evaluation types, explored the field of impact evaluation, increased support to decentralized evaluations, and has sought to draw closer to other services, high-level management, and AFD country offices. This diversification explains the strong increase in budget and human resources in the department, despite a certain stability in the number of evaluations conducted.

Overall, we view this diversification as being a positive development. It addresses several key expectations formulated in the preceding pages, including the need for more in-depth information on the impact of certain interventions, an improved quality of decentralized evaluations, and an increased usefulness of evaluations for operational teams and governing bodies. We also note that, overall, EVA has a key role to play over the next few years in addressing most of the challenges and recommendations laid out in this evaluation.

### 2.4.3 – Increased resources for evaluation, that could nevertheless be stepped up even further given the challenges of evaluation at AFD

EVA's human resources have been strengthened in recent years. The growth was especially significant in 2017, 2018, and 2019. EVA only had around 10 FTEs (full-time equivalent positions) between 2007 and 2016. This increased to 24 FTEs in 2019. The budget allocated to evaluations has also increased regularly since 2015 (rising from 2.9 million euros in 2015 to 5.6 million euros in 2019). This budget includes the cost of EVA's human resources, evaluation providers, and the evaluation processes themselves.

In spite of the increase in staff and funds allocated to evaluation, the budget that AFD is dedicating to evaluation remains low as a percentage of AFD's funding commitments. The increase of the resources allocated to evaluation is, in fact, more or less in line with the increase of AFD's overall budget since 2015.



### 3. Challenges and recommendations

Our findings highlight 15 key challenges for evaluation at AFD. For each of these challenges, we suggest a series of recommendations to be discussed when preparing the next evaluation policy. These 15 challenges are grouped in four key areas:

Improving tools and processes to meet accountability requirements

Improving evaluation governance to fulfill the need for evaluations that can drive action and decision making

Improving evaluation quality

Improving the coordination, management, and resources available to the evaluation process

#### 3.1 Priority Area No. 1 – Improving tools and processes to meet accountability requirements

##### CHALLENGE NO. 1 – CLARIFYING THE CONTRIBUTION OF EVALUATION TO ACCOUNTABILITY

**1.1 → In the drafting of the future evaluation policy, delineate the contribution of evaluation to accountability, and clarify how this contribution is articulated with others, and, in particular, with the contribution made by the monitoring of results throughout the interventions.** This work would benefit from being carried out jointly with AFD's supervisory ministries and governing bodies in order to formalize a shared vision, both in terms of accountability expectations vis à vis AFD as well as how evaluation can meet them.

**1.2 → For the time being, maintain the principle of a percentage of interventions that must be evaluated (currently 50%), without resorting to a random selection of evaluations.** The minimum threshold helps ensure the persistence of the evaluation effort and remains as a guarantee of credibility (without forming a response to the systematic demand for information on results). This objective is currently necessary to provide reassurance on the quality and performance of interventions and will remain so as long as monitoring systems remain quite

weak or report back too little data on results. On the other hand, any random sampling of interventions to be evaluated would be inconsistent with the need for a more strategic programming of evaluations, which results in selecting the interventions to be evaluated based on specific objectives, expressed by the operational teams, partners, or supervisory ministries.

##### CHALLENGE NO. 2 – STRENGTHENING RESULTS MONITORING MECHANISMS: THE TWIN PILLAR OF THE RESPONSE TO ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

**2.1 → Increase support to operational teams in setting up and running result monitoring mechanisms.** This enhanced support involves having AFD undergo a cultural and organizational transformation, which would make results-based management a structuring orientation for the organization, as well as give more importance to results' monitoring in the role and practices of the operational teams. To achieve this, it will be necessary to make time for monitoring in the operational teams planning, and to clarify how operational teams and their partners are to be supported (individually or collectively), and to mandate a service within AFD to provide this support.



**2.2 → Keep articulating, with the sectoral divisions, result indicators (related to the monitoring of projects) and aggregated indicators that provide a more “macro” picture of AFD’s results.** In several sectors, the finding is that the two levels of indicators don’t easily “talk” to each other, in spite of work conducted internally to elaborate pyramids of indicators. Frameworks of connected indicators, from the intervention level to the global level, that would make sense for those tasked with field monitoring, would be an important step to improve monitoring mechanisms.

### **CHALLENGE NO. 3 – FURTHER REINFORCING IMPACT EVALUATION APPROACHES IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY**

**3.1 → Continue developing counterfactual impact evaluations,** especially when the demonstration of the impact can be extrapolated to large swathes of AFD’s action and can therefore contribute greatly to accountability. At the same time, it would be in AFD’s interest to have a flexible approach to impact evaluation (which AFD has started doing) and to exploit the opportunity for dialogue and capacity building they provide. The space given to impact evaluation at AFD must take into consideration the role that the future Independent Evaluation Commission could be willing to assume in this evaluation category.

**3.2 → Beyond counterfactual approaches, other methods of impact and change analysis should be explored.** These methods require lighter formats/budgets and could be applied to a larger number of interventions. Going further in the exploration of a series of qualitative and participatory approaches that can help identify and understand “changes” that may have occurred during the interventions would be useful (Outcome Harvesting, Most Significant Change, Realist Evaluation approach, etc.). These methods are used by other public and private donors and are already guiding some recent evaluation exercises engaged by AFD. Progress in this area will require a close collaboration between EVA’s “quantitative” and “qualitative” teams, to design and adjust mixed approaches together.

### **CHALLENGE NO. 4 – STRENGTHENING THE EVALUATION OF THE COHERENCE WITH THE HIGH-LEVEL POLICY OR STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS OF AFD AND ITS SUPERVISORY MINISTRIES**

**4.1 → Explore closer collaboration between AFD, its supervisory ministries, and the Independent Evaluation Commission in order to develop a specific “coherence evaluation” methodology** (as was done concerning the evaluation of policy-based loans) in order to ensure that these evaluations are conducted at the right level of strategic analysis (which will vary with respect to the commitments concerned).

**4.2 → AFD could also look into developing “coherence evaluation” as part of its “broad-scope evaluation” category.** A key methodological aspect will be to take into account, in these evaluations, ex-ante and ex-post appreciation on dimensions linked to the “macro-level” commitments of AFD.

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### **3.2 Priority Area No. 2 – Improving evaluation governance to fulfill the need for evaluations that can drive action and decision making**

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### **CHALLENGE NO. 5 – PROGRAMMING EVALUATIONS IN A STRATEGIC AND CONCERTED WAY**

We propose several recommendations concerning evaluation programming, with repercussion for both internal and external stakeholders. Given the importance of the issue and the number of players involved, it is important that governance and overall timing of the programming exercise be clearly defined to avoid contradictions or redundancies.

**5.1 → On a yearly basis and at the Board of Directors level, draft a strategic orientation note describing the priority needs in terms of evaluation.** This document would help guide both the strategic evaluations (“broad-scope” evaluations) and the project evaluations. The annual basis would have the advantage of lining up better with decision-making. The note would directly involve AFD’s supervisory ministries (and possibly also the future Independent Evaluation Commission). As a result, AFD’s supervisory ministries represented in the Board of Directors would have to engage in prior consultation

with the relevant directorates within their own institutions.

**5.2 → One strategic evaluation per year could be commissioned directly by the Board of Directors.** This would contribute to bolster the evaluation culture within the Board. We believe that this proposal would help shift from an evaluation system that provides “reassurance” towards one that influences decision making.

**5.3 → At the Operations Directorate (DOE) level, associating evaluation programming and reviews of business plans on a sectoral basis could help impart more visibility to evaluation within operational teams.** The evaluation programming would then be managed jointly by EVA and DOE. Maintaining a close connection with AFD’s geographical departments (and with the corresponding geographical directorates within the supervisory ministries) will ensure that these departments will take ownership of the planned evaluations from the start.

**5.4 → While ensuring an improved targeting of evaluations thanks to the strategic orientation note, keep much of the programming open to the needs and demands of AFD country offices** (thus it should be avoided to impose too many criteria to select evaluations).

To ensure that the evaluations are tailored to the needs of the operational staff, **open project evaluations to a range of formats and timings**, moving beyond the dominant model of ex-post evaluations conducted at the end of projects.

The objective would be to further integrate:

- midterm evaluations, to inform action during projects;
- final evaluations during the last year of the project, in order to inform the subsequent phase of the intervention;
- evaluations carried out several years after the end of the projects, in order to provide better hindsight on effects.

## **CHALLENGE NO. 6 – FOSTERING RECOMMENDATIONS OWNERSHIP AT VARIOUS LEVELS**

**6.1 → At the Board of Directors level, ensure that the recommendations of the most important evaluations** (as identified in

the strategic orientation note mentioned in Recommendation 5.1) **are discussed**. The aim here is to highlight the potential impacts of key findings and recommendations from these evaluations on AFD’s strategic orientations. It must be noted that this would be a profound change in the governance of evaluations, as the Board of Directors would then be in a position where it actively requests evaluation findings and recommendations with a view to improve decision making. This will require aligning evaluation reporting with the Board of Directors’ decision-making cycles and favour short and readable formats focused on the most strategic elements, to help with the uptake of evaluations recommendations. Finally, prior to any discussion of recommendations at the Board of Directors level, it remains necessary to ensure that the relevant operational teams have taken a position on the recommendations and that their position is presented to the Board of Directors.

**6.2 → Engage more systematically, at the level of EVA, into a cross-cutting analysis of the evaluations’ findings based on major thematic or transverse subject areas (structured, for example, around the six major transitions defined by AFD).** The aim is to further amplify the approach already undertaken over the past few years by EVA in terms of ensuring that the evaluations are discussed by operational teams, which requires consolidating the findings and facilitate exchanges with operational teams based on the cross-cutting analysis of evaluations’ findings. This “post-evaluation” work is one of the main avenues to make evaluation more useful.

**6.3 → At the country level, involve operational teams and contracting authorities in the monitoring of recommendations**, without making it a systematic obligation (to prevent creating a new “box to be ticked”). This monitoring work would make particular sense if it contributes to fostering the dialogue between AFD and national players. It must therefore be favored when a public policy dialogue (or a strategic dialogue) is conducted over time between AFD and its counterparts.

## **CHALLENGE NO. 7 – VALORIZING EVALUATIONS, TRAINING OPERATIONAL TEAMS, AND PROVIDING GUIDANCE ON EVALUATION**

**7.1 → Strengthen the ownership of evaluations internally. This requires that evaluations' presentations be iterative and engaging processes, rather than a one-shot dissemination of information.** This recommendation ties in with Recommendation 6.2, which emphasizes the need for a learning process fed by evaluation findings and recommendations. To improve the influence and ownership of evaluations, coordinating the post-evaluation phase between the EVA Department, the Communication (CMN) Department, and the Operations Directorate (DOE) would prove useful for certain evaluations.

**7.2 → Continue the development of training tools on evaluation and make them available to operational teams.** This would include the development of e-learning tools to ensure that all teams have access to a set of basic references in evaluation and can refer to them as needed. Within these training tools, introducing the diversity of formats and timings for evaluation along the whole project cycle, and highlighting how they can respond to the needs of the operational teams, will prove useful.

**7.3 → Extend the "framework agreement" mechanism beyond the current three regional AFD offices.** These framework agreements (signed between a regional AFD office, the relevant geographical Department, the EVA Department, and evaluation consultants) can help overcome some of the barriers that limit the involvement of operational agents in the evaluation process. They alleviate a large portion of the administrative time spent on these evaluations, they simplify the search for evaluators, and they facilitate the cross-cutting review of evaluations from a given region. New framework agreements should be considered when a critical mass of evaluations is to be carried out each year in a region, either because of the sheer number of projects implemented in that region or because AFD seeks to place a particular evaluation effort in that region. However, it has to be noted that framework agreements transfer some administrative work to both EVA and the geographical Department concerned. This will have to be considered.

**7.4 → Strengthening the role of AFD regional offices in the programming and supporting of evaluations.** AFD regional offices are well-placed to provide support to AFD country offices, liaise with EVA and transversally review the various evaluations conducted in the region. Because these objectives fall within the mandate of EVA, it could be interesting to consider deconcentrating part of EVA's staff at the level of these regional offices. In this regard, it must be observed that various approaches have been adopted by other funding organizations, including the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), which decentralizes many of its internal evaluators, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which embed evaluators within programs.

## **CHALLENGE NO. 8 – INVOLVING THE COUNTERPARTS AT ALL STAGES OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS**

**8.1 → Reflecting on the counterparts' level of involvement in the evaluation process from the very first stages of the project should help consider several options, including having the counterpart fully manage the evaluation.** A commitment to greater counterpart involvement when the evaluation creates an opportunity for broader policy dialogue could be particularly fruitful. The abilities of the contracting authorities (in terms of managing the evaluation process) must also be taken into consideration.

**8.2 → Including financing for evaluation more frequently in the project budget would allow for a better integration of evaluation in the project dynamics.** Midterm evaluations, in particular, are useful in helping operational teams and contracting authorities adapt their actions and should be included more frequently in project budgets. Earmarking long in advance (during the design phase) budgets for ex-post evaluations appears to be more problematic.

**8.3 → Strengthen the "shared accountability" dimension of decentralized evaluations by ensuring joint follow-up of recommendations.** Three situations seem appropriate: long-lasting projects; projects that foster public policy dialogue; and projects for which accountability is a major challenge at a national level (see Recommendation 6.3).

## **CHALLENGE NO. 9 – IMPROVING THE COORDINATION OF ODA EVALUATION BETWEEN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**

As suggested in recommendations 5.1 and 6.1, the involvement of supervisory ministries could be strengthened first at the level of the AFD Board of Directors, with active participation both in the drafting of the strategic orientation note (prior to the programming of evaluations) and in the follow-up of the recommendations made by the most important evaluations.

**9.1 → The direct involvement of the supervisory ministries in AFD's evaluations could increase along two directions.** First, the supervisory ministries should be more closely associated when evaluations contribute to decision-making processes led by them (for example, in the case of fund renewals). Second, when they have a strategic role in the projects evaluated, more interviews “at the right level” should be conducted with respondents from the supervisory ministries.

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### **3.3 Priority Area No. 3 – Improving evaluation quality**

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## **CHALLENGE NO. 10 – FOCUSING EVALUATIONS**

**10.1 → Continue taking a step back from the “standard” evaluation framework, particularly in the case of decentralized evaluations. Prioritize DAC evaluation criteria to be considered in any given evaluation and increase the requirements for more precise evaluation questions.** Taking some liberty with the standard framework helps ensure that evaluations provide a useful assessment in response to precise questions. Excessively standardizing the evaluations decreases learning opportunities and usefulness, while still not being able to provide a systematic response to the accountability demands regarding project results.

## **CHALLENGE NO. 11 – IMPROVING THE EVALUABILITY OF INTERVENTIONS**

**11.1 → Continue to improve the evaluability of interventions,** including by reinforcing monitoring mechanisms (see Recommendation 2.1). The strengthening of ex-ante evaluation processes is also important as it can help establish baselines and intervention frameworks based

on clear objectives and indicators. Recognize that evaluability is a different challenge when interventions have to be adaptable and operate on flexible frameworks, for example in crisis areas, and adapt evaluation methods accordingly.

## **CHALLENGE NO. 12 – IMPROVING CRITICAL ANALYSIS CAPACITY AND QUALITY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**12.1 → Steering committees of evaluations should be careful to balance the demands for reconstructing the logic of interventions and establishing comprehensive reviews of the results (which should primarily be done in the project's completion reports) on one end, and the demands for an in-depth critical analysis of interventions on the other.** Put the onus on ensuring that analysis be prioritized, especially during the final stages and the collective moments of the evaluations.

**12.2 → The ToRs for evaluations should be more specific concerning the quality of recommendations and their actionability** (i.e., recommendations that clearly indicate what needs to change). Evaluation questions must be assessed in view of the actionability of the recommendations that could stem from them.

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### **3.4 Priority Area No. 4 – Improving coordination, management, and resources available for evaluation**

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## **CHALLENGE NO. 13 – REDEFINING COMEVA'S ROLE**

**13.1 → Task COMEVA with the monitoring of the upcoming evaluation policy.** The new evaluation policy will set out challenges that must be met, with associated objectives. The policy may be supplemented by a multi-year action plan detailing the different stages of its implementation and including relevant progress indicators. COMEVA could be tasked with following up on the implementation of the evaluation policy and its action plans.

**13.2 → Have COMEVA retain a role as an “evaluation adviser.”** In this capacity, COMEVA would carry out an in-depth examination of certain evaluation exercises, especially those

exploring new evaluations methods or addressing strategic challenges for AFD. It must be noted that these two roles are achievable with COMEVA having a similar composition to the one it has now, which associates members of the supervisory ministries together with independent members, with expertise in evaluation as a profile priority.

#### **CHALLENGE NO. 14 – STRENGTHENING EVA'S SUPPORT AND FACILITATION ROLE**

**14.1 → Continue with the diversification of evaluation formats, timings, and methods based on the priority needs it permits to address.** EVA has started working on a "Map of methods", which highlights the diversity of possible approaches that can be used according to needs. This could be developed further as EVA continues exploring a wide range of tools.

**14.2 → Continue EVA's investment in approaches for measuring impact and improving data management,** which constitute an important response to one of the key expectations in terms of accountability mentioned in previous pages (see Recommendations 3.1 and 3.2).

**14.3 → Continue EVA's investment in decentralized evaluations. Improve EVA's overview of all the evaluations carried out on AFD interventions (including those commissioned by other organizations/institutions).** We believe EVA's current overview strategy helps promote the aggregation and dissemination of learnings derived from evaluations. It helps ensure that the benefits of evaluation at AFD are higher than the sum of its parts (i.e., the evaluations considered separately).

In connection, EVA could set up a directory of evaluations which could be subsequently extended to other public-sector providers of ODA. This directory would improve the monitoring and the visibility of the French ODA evaluation work.

**14.4 → Continue EVA's efforts to advance evaluation culture at AFD and to shift to a more influential evaluation.** Some recommendations in the former sections clarify how EVA could be up to this challenge:

- **strengthen EVA's role in facilitating the programming of evaluations** in liaison with the Operations Directorate (DOE), the

AFD Directorates, AFD executive management, the Board of Directors, the concerned Directorates in the supervisory ministries, etc. (Challenge no. 5);

- **strengthen EVA's role in promoting evaluations and facilitating their use,** at the level of both the governing bodies and the operational teams;
- **clarify EVA's role regarding the design of robust result monitoring systems.** EVA increased visibility and availability has resulted in a knock-on effect and created demand for more support in connection with the monitoring of interventions.

Should EVA ultimately not end up at the front line in the response to this demand, it must be ensured that the Evaluation Department remains closely involved in this support.

**14.5 → Facilitate (or actively take part in) an expertise group on evaluation.** This group would involve the evaluation units of the supervisory ministries, the members of the AFD Group (Expertise France, Proparco,]), and external experts. It would be responsible for brokering information, building capacity, facilitating discussions on evaluation, archiving evaluations, etc. Its objective would be to maintain regular dialogue on evaluation tools and methods, and to tie in with the external thinking on evaluation (facilitating exchange and creating a community of practice).

This responsibility could fall within the competencies of the future Independent Evaluation Commission. The position of AFD (and more specifically EVA) in this group will therefore depend on the role played by the Commission in this respect.



## CHALLENGE NO. 15 – BOLSTERING AVAILABLE RESOURCES FOR EVALUATION

Several of the recommendations mentioned in the previous pages call for greater resources to be devoted to evaluation. The emphasis on results-based management (and the strengthening of monitoring mechanisms that this implies), the need for impact measurement and data management tools, the continued support for decentralized evaluations to ensure their quality, or the demand for new evaluation methods that focus on the coherence of interventions, are all challenges that argue for increased resources for evaluation. This greater investment in evaluation is one of the conditions that could help meet the learning needs and increasing demands for accountability.

### 15.1 → The new evaluation policy will need to consider the need for a greater investment (both financial and human) in evaluation.

We are not in a position to estimate these additional costs in the current evaluation, nor are we able to analyze where the funding should come from. Both will be a matter for the operationalization of the new evaluation policy.

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## 3.5 Key points to help build the new evaluation policy

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With a view to help build the new evaluation policy, we propose focusing on four challenges that appear to be crucial and structuring:

- **Evaluation programming must be more strategic and concerted, and better target the diversity of needs (by further adapting evaluation formats, timetables, and processes).** The challenge is to take into account the proposals of the Board of Directors, executive management, departments, supervisory ministries, and operational teams, on the basis of a more open approach to programming. Clarification of the governance and timetable of the programming exercise, including its validation, is also essential in this respect.
- **Evaluation at AFD must be more than simply the sum of the evaluations considered separately.** This observation points to a need to link and capitalize on evaluations in order to draw lessons from them in an aggregated way, with the aim of having a greater influence on practices and decisions.
- **The future evaluation policy has every interest in being built around the parallel strengthening of monitoring results mechanisms,** on which evaluations can be based, and which can play their role in the response to accountability expectations.
- **In the perspective of a gradual redefinition of relations between AFD and counterparts, monitoring and evaluation have a central role to play in moving toward a principle of "shared accountability".** Putting counterparts at the forefront of the design, management and monitoring of certain evaluations would contribute to further promoting dialogue on public policies.

In addition, the new evaluation policy will have to take into account several institutional changes that will have an impact on the organization and governance of evaluation at AFD :



- **The fact that the new policy will apply to the entire AFD Group (including Expertise France, Proparco, FICOL) implies agreement and understanding on how to think about and conduct evaluation.**

A balance will have to be found between harmonizing practices at the Group level and respecting specificities. Meanwhile, the supervisory ministries express the need for a greater collaboration around the evaluation processes undertaken. These two trends may require the creation of a platform to exchange ideas among the members of these various organizations (a community of practice), which could bolster the expertise in evaluation and advance a shared vision of the evaluation of French ODA.

- **The creation of the Independent Evaluation Commission will necessarily have implications for the way evaluations are conducted within AFD. It will bring about new challenges in terms of coordination (particularly in terms of evaluation programming) and information management. The portfolio of evaluations conducted by AFD, as well as the balance between objectives, could be altered.** The pressure for evaluations meeting certain expectations in terms of accountability and/or independence could shift towards the Commission. The most "macro-level" "coherence evaluations" could be commissioned by the Commission rather than by AFD. These possibilities should be considered in the development of the new evaluation policy.

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# List of acronyms and abbreviations

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|           |  |
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| AFD       | French Development Agency (Agence française de développement)  |
| DAC       | Development Assistance Committee (OECD)  |
| CIF       | Cross-cutting Intervention Framework (AFD)   |
| CMN       | Communication Department (AFD)   |
| CNDSI     | French National Council for Development and International Solidarity   |
| COMEVA    | AFD's Evaluation Committee   |
| DFID      | Department for International Development (replaced in 2020 by the FCDO, or Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) |
| DG Trésor | Directorate General of the French Treasury   |
| DOE       | Operations Directorate (AFD)   |
| EVA       | Evaluation and Knowledge Capitalization Department (AFD)   |
| FICOL     | French Local Authorities Financing Facility (AFD)  |
| FTE       | Full-Time Equivalent   |
| IRS       | Innovation, Research, and Knowledge Directorate (AFD)  |
| MEAE      | French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères)                      |
| MOC       | Means and Objectives Contract (AFD)  |
| ODA       | Official Development Assistance  |
| OECD      | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development   |
| SDGs      | Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations)   |
| SOP       | Strategic Orientation Plan (AFD)   |
| PBL       | Policy-Based Loan  |
| PCR       | Project Completion Report (AFD)  |
| SIF       | Sectoral Intervention Framework  |
| ToR       | Terms of Reference   |



**Agence française  
de développement**  
5, rue Roland Barthes  
75012 Paris | France  
[www.afd.fr](http://www.afd.fr)

Innovation, Research, and  
Knowledge Directorate.  
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Capitalization (EVA)  
Department

The Agence Française de Développement (AFD) Group is a public institution that implements France's policy in the areas of development and international solidarity. Composed of AFD (which is in charge of funding the public sector and NGOs), Proparco (for the financing of the private sector), and soon Expertise France (a technical co-operation agency), the Group funds, supports, and accelerates the transition to a more coherent and resilient world.

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Towards a world in common.

**Publication Director** Rémy Rioux  
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