



ODI Global

Briefing Paper

Are MDBs becoming ‘better’ institutions for their clients?

Early insights from the 2025 survey of clients of multilateral development banks

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Key messages

MDBs still greatly matter. Over 75% of respondents find MDB functions very or extremely relevant for long-term development.

Most governments believe that their priorities are well-supported, but alignment is stronger with MDBs that have a long-standing country presence.

Financing demand is expected to rise: 57% see demand for MDB loans and grants increasing in the next 5–10 years, driven by large financing needs and the cheaper terms of MDB financing compared to other sources.

MDBs seem to work well together. Overall, 48% believe MDBs are coordinating well or very well with each other at the country level, while 15% rate coordination as poor or very poor in their countries.

Speed of financing operations is still an issue: for 43% of government officials, the time from conception to first disbursement is ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ long. Only 11% of government officials think that it is ‘not long at all’ or ‘slightly long’.

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Introduction

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) have been under growing scrutiny. To remain effective and deliver greater impact, they need to adapt their strategies and financial instruments in light of their clients' priorities.

This second edition of ODI Global's independent survey of MDB clients captures critical insights into how MDBs should evolve to meet these expectations.

While full results will be published in early 2026, this briefing paper shares early insights on selected aspects (relevance and effectiveness of MDBs, future demand for MDB support, MDB country-level coordination and considerations on the length of the project cycle) to inform ongoing discussions among shareholders and MDB management.

The strategies, operations and finances of multilateral development banks (MDBs) have been under intense scrutiny in recent years. To remain effective and deliver greater impact, MDBs need to shape their strategies and financing instruments around the priorities of their client countries – both individually and as a system. However, there is limited information on how clients view the relevance, performance and effectiveness of MDBs. While MDBs conduct regular surveys with their clients, these are rarely conducted simultaneously across all countries, or tend to focus on project closures.

To address this gap, in 2021 ODI Global carried out the first-ever independent comparative survey of MDB sovereign clients. The survey spanned 73 countries and included around 500 respondents, both government representatives who negotiated with six MDBs and their counterparts in MDB country offices. Our main goal was to inform how the strategies and financing instruments of MDBs should evolve to reflect client perspectives. The survey looked at key issues including the future demand for MDBs' products and how effective and efficient their operations are.

The survey findings were cited in the World Bank Group's *Evolution Roadmap*, prompting a critical review of operational efficiency, and led to a recommendation by the G20 Independent Expert Group on Strengthening MDBs to run an independent client survey every two

years to track satisfaction and establish essential benchmarks. The results have also shaped advocacy efforts and influenced donor positions, particularly around replenishing of concessional lending windows.

With these reforms under way, we felt it was time to take stock of their effects, track progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the G20 process, and look more closely at issues that have emerged in the MDB reform agenda in recent years, such as greater coordination of MDBs working as a system, streamlining of operations and expanding the support to project preparation. The second edition of the online MDB client survey offers a rare, comparative view of how governments and MDB staff assess MDB performance, relevance and future demand.

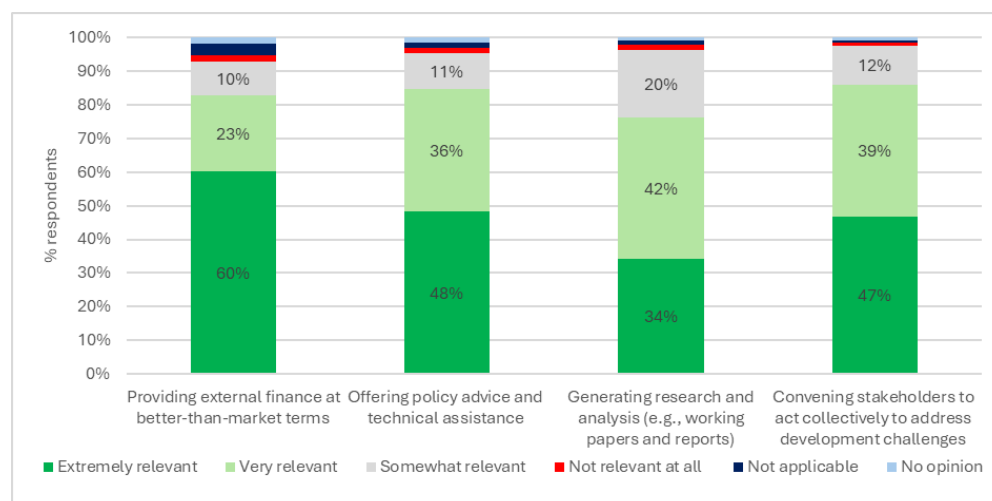
Our second survey, conducted between December 2024 and April 2025, expands the scope to 120 countries and 11 MDBs, reaching almost 650 respondents. It is complemented by 12 in-depth country case studies, gathered from May to November 2025.

While the full results of the online survey and the country studies will be published in early 2026, this briefing note outlines some of the key preliminary findings to inform discussion. For the methodology, please refer to the [technical note](#) and the [survey text](#).

1 Relevance and effectiveness of MDBs

MDBs play a central role in the development strategies of client countries. MDB core functions – financing, technical assistance and policy advice, convening and research – are still considered highly relevant. At least three-quarters of respondents rated each of these functions as very or extremely important for their countries' long-term socio-economic development (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Relevance of the roles and functions of MDBs – all respondents (2025)



Source: Authors' survey based on all respondents (643). Question: *Looking at what multilateral development banks generally offer, how would you rate each of these items in terms of their relevance for the long-term social and economic development of #country#*. Numbers in the graph are rounded to the nearest decimal point.

Country priorities vary by income group. For concessional borrowers, below-market financing is paramount, with 89% rating it very or extremely relevant. In contrast, non-concessional borrowers prioritise technical assistance and policy advice, with 85% highlighting their importance. Compared to 2022, a greater number of governments now consider both financial and advisory services as 'extremely relevant'. This underscores the sustained demand for MDB support.

When asked about perceived effectiveness across the four functions of MDBs (see Figure 1), governments drew clear distinctions between institutions. Legacy MDBs – the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in particular – are consistently rated as the most effective, with more than 60% of respondents describing them as very or extremely effective across functions. By contrast, newer or smaller MDBs such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) and the New Development Bank (NDB) received lower ratings, reflecting their more limited in-country presence and visibility as well as length of operations (see Table 1).

Table 1 Perceived effectiveness of individual MDBs by government respondents (% of respondents)

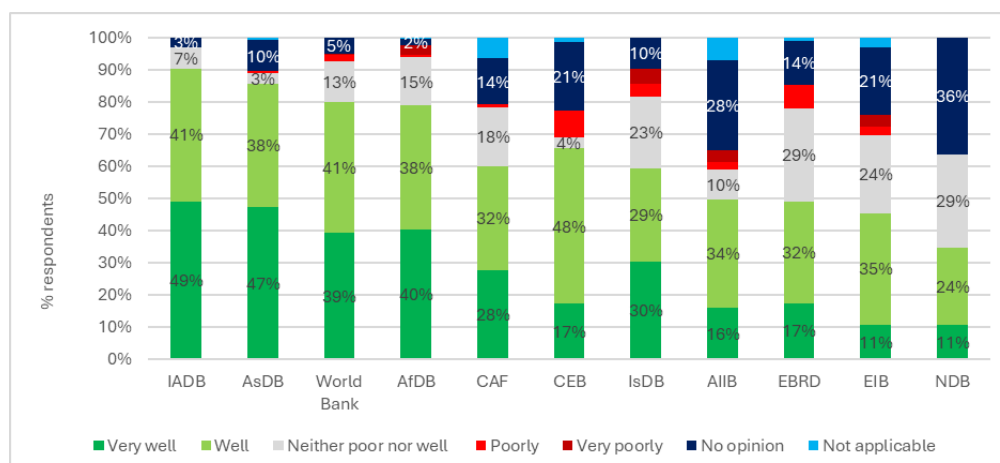
		Providing external finance at better-than-market terms		Offering policy advice and technical assistance		Generating research and analysis		Convening stakeholders to act collectively	
% of respondents		Effective	Not effective	Effective	Not effective	Effective	Not effective	Effective	Not effective
	Obs	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
AfDB	147	73.9	19.5	62.6	34.2	58.8	36.9	63.2	34.1
WB	389	72.7	18.5	72.9	22.1	74.9	19.4	74.1	21.0
AsDB	99	69.3	13.0	73.2	15.5	63.4	23.2	66.2	22.5
IADB	89	62.8	19.9	72.4	17.2	81.5	9.4	69.7	22.9
IsDB	85	60.1	27.1	40.6	37.3	27.1	50.4	45.5	44.1
CAF	83	53.7	24.3	56.7	19.5	47.2	25.8	44.2	27.6
AIIB	109	40.8	18.1	37.3	20.0	34.9	22.3	38.4	23.2
EIB	286	38.3	25.9	32.0	31.6	32.5	31.6	34.9	31.9
EBRD	37	35.7	37.9	42.7	32.9	33.0	38.6	39.8	28.7
CEB	28	17.9	25.0	22.8	31.0	25.9	23.4	24.2	29.6
NDB	7	14.4	51.4	0.0	59.4	0.0	59.4	14.4	20.5

Source: Authors' survey. Question: *In your opinion, how effective or not effective is the [MDB] at delivering each function?* Based on all government respondents; 398 for the World Bank, 145 for the AfDB, 97 for the AsDB; 100 for the IADB, 129 for the AIIB, 59 for the EBRD, 317 for the EIB, 32 for the CEB, 90 for CAF, 101 for the IsDB and 10 for the NDB.

MDBs are generally perceived as well-aligned with national priorities – particularly where they maintain long-standing country offices and formal strategies. Between 80% and 90% of government respondents said the World Bank, AfDB, AsDB and IADB support their priorities well or very well. In contrast, fewer than 50% gave similar ratings to institutions such as the AIIB, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the NDB (see Figure 2).

¹ These figures are purely indicative due to the very small number of respondents answering the question in relation to NDB. Other options included no opinion or not applicable.

Figure 2 MDB support for country priorities

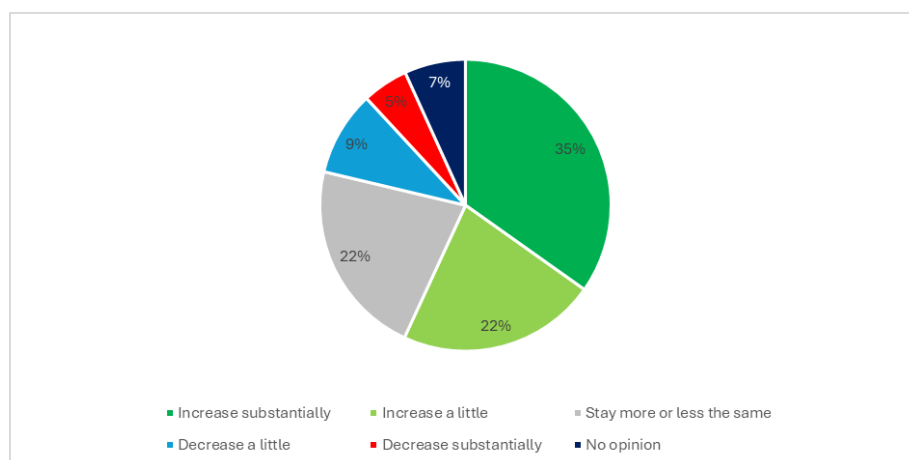


Source: Authors' survey. Question: *Thinking about individual MDBs operating in your country, how poorly or how well do the following MDBs support the priorities of #country#?* Based on all government respondents; 398 for the World Bank, 145 for the AfDB, 97 for the AsDB; 100 for the IADB, 129 for the AIIB, 59 for the EBRD, 317 for the EIB, 32 for the CEB, 90 for CAF, 101 for the IsDB and 10 for the NDB. Numbers in the graph are rounded to the nearest decimal point.

2 Future demand for MDB support

Governments expect demand for MDB support to grow over the next decade. In the 2025 survey, 57% of government respondents anticipated higher demand for MDB loans and grants in the coming five to 10 years – this is up slightly from 56% in 2022. Only 14% foresaw a decline in demand, highlighting continued reliance on MDB support (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Trends in the demand for grants and loans from MDBs



Source: Authors' survey. Question: *In the next 5 - 10 years, do you think the demand for grants and loans offered by multilateral development banks from #country# will increase or decrease?* Based on a total of 525 respondents: 396 government officials and 129 MDB officials. Numbers in the graph are rounded to the nearest decimal point.

Demand is strongest in Africa and Asia-Pacific. In Africa and Asia-Pacific, 61% and 66% of respondents respectively expect demand to rise. By contrast, 46% of officials in Latin America anticipate higher demand, while 16% foresee a decline. Concessional borrowers are particularly emphatic: nearly two-thirds expect demand to increase, compared with less than half of non-concessional borrowers.

The reasons governments cite for rising demand are familiar. Governments cite well-known reasons for the expected increase in MDB support. Large financing needs, the affordability of concessional resources and MDBs' ability to finance transformative projects all feature prominently. Those anticipating a decline in demand pointed to debt sustainability concerns, the relatively high cost of some MDB loans, and the availability of faster alternatives.

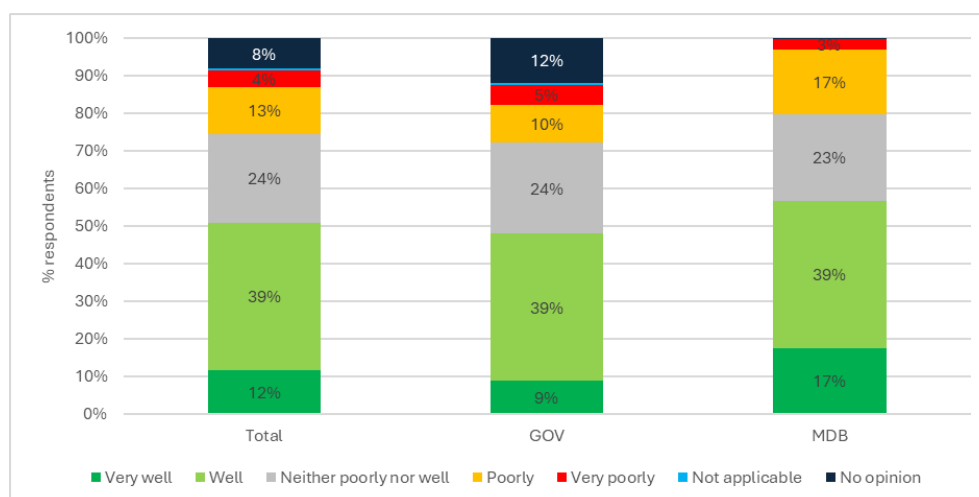
Technical assistance and policy advice are expected to remain in demand. Just over half of respondents foresee increased demand for technical assistance and policy advice, although MDB staff are more optimistic than governments (63% versus 45%). Demand is strongest for support that is timely, demand-driven and grounded in local context.

3 Country-level coordination of MDBs

By coordinating and cooperating more closely, particularly at the country level and in common priority areas, MDBs can be more than the sum of their parts for their clients. However, such coordination and cooperation can be costly and challenging, generating direct and opportunity costs as each institution's incentives prioritise its performance over collective results.

Fewer than half of government respondents believe that MDBs are coordinating well in their countries. Overall, 48% believe MDBs are coordinating well or very well with each other at the country level, while 15% rate coordination as poor or very poor in their countries (see Figure 4). Concerns are more pronounced in Africa, where 21% of officials rated coordination as poor or very poor. Despite ongoing efforts to improve coordination among MDBs, assessments of performance have not improved across countries between the two surveys.

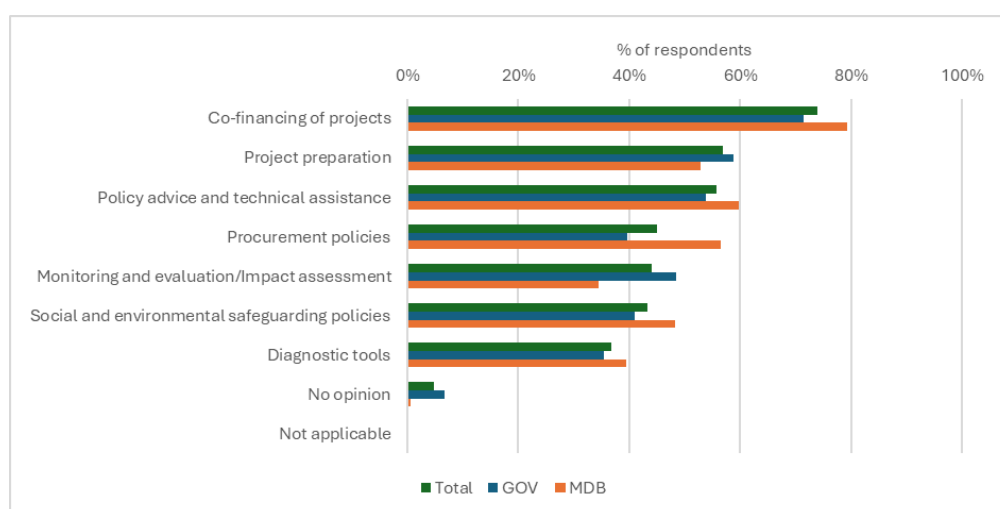
Figure 4 Perception of MDB coordination at the country level



Source: Authors' survey. Question: *In your opinion, are MDBs coordinating between themselves poorly or well at the country level?* Based on a total of 525 respondents: 396 government officials and 129 MDB officials. Numbers in the graph are rounded to the nearest decimal point.

Co-financing is the top priority for MDB coordination. Both government officials and MDB representatives identify co-financing as the top priority for coordination among MDBs, with 74% across both groups citing this. This is followed by coordination on project preparation (57%) and on policy advice and technical assistance (56%) (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Areas for MDB coordination at the country level



Source: Authors' survey. Question: *In your opinion, in which areas should MDBs coordinate among themselves in #country#?* Based on a total of 525 respondents: 396 government officials and 129 MDB officials. Numbers in the graph are rounded to the nearest decimal point.

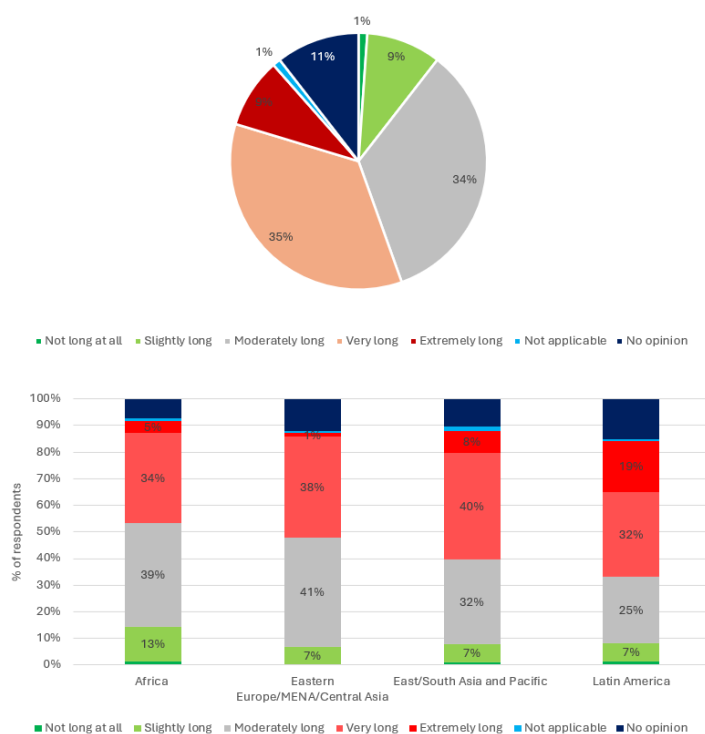
4 Length of the project cycle

Safeguarding standards and procurement procedures is frequently described as complex, slow and poorly adapted to local contexts. Government officials point to burdensome reporting, limited use of national contractors, and weak reliance on country systems.

For 43% of government officials, the time from conception to first disbursement is 'very' or 'extremely' long. Only 11% of government

officials think that it is ‘not long at all’ or ‘slightly long’. In Latin America, nearly one in five government respondents (19%) think that the length of the cycle is ‘extremely long’ (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Perceived length of the project cycle (government officials only)



Source: Authors’ survey. Question: *Thinking about a typical MDB project, how long would say it takes from conception to first disbursement in #country#.* Based on 395 government respondents. Numbers in the graph are rounded to the nearest decimal point.

5 Concluding remarks

In this briefing note, we offered a preview of selected results of the 2025 online survey of MDB clients in four key areas: the relevance and effectiveness of MDBs, the demand for MDB assistance, the quality of coordination of MDBs at the country level, and countries’ views on the length of the project cycle.

In early 2026 we will publish the full report, with the complete set of results of the online survey, the findings from 12 country studies that will complement and expand the questionnaire results as well as the recommendations for MDB management and shareholders emerging from the overall analysis.