

Briefing Paper

Reforming multilateral development banks: perspectives from IDA countries

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Key messages

What MDBs offer matters for IDA countries: at least 80% of respondents rate each MDB function – concessional financing, technical assistance, policy advice, research and convening power – as either very or extremely relevant to their country's socioeconomic development.

Demand for MDB grants and loans is expected to increase in IDA countries over the next five to 10 years, driven by large financing needs and concessional financing that does not put pressure on debt sustainability.

Coordination among MDBs matters to IDA countries but the perception of its quality has not improved since the first survey in 2021.

Government respondents in IDA countries broadly view the cycle of MDB projects and programmes as too long. Nearly half (45%) consider the time from concept to first disbursement as very or extremely long.

In IDA countries, 43% of respondents identified limited government financing for project preparation as a constraint.

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Introduction

Development needs are rising – driven by climate vulnerabilities, fragility, rising debt and successive global shocks – while the options for affordable financing are narrowing. Bilateral donors are cutting aid budgets. In this context, concessional finance matters more than ever, particularly for lower-income countries with limited or no access to international capital markets.

The role of multilateral development banks (MDBs) in supporting lower-income countries in financing their socio-economic development is critical. However, we know little about the perspectives of client countries regarding the relevance and performance of MDBs, what they value in their financing and operations, and what they see as their main weaknesses. For MDBs to remain relevant to their clients, and to boost the efficiency and impact of their support, the views and demands of client countries should inform and shape their strategies and financing instruments.

This briefing paper draws on an extensive survey of nearly 650 government and MDB officials across 125 countries, which aims to understand clients' views on the roles, strengths, weaknesses and future direction of MDBs (Prizzon et al., 2026).¹ The study followed an initial survey, conducted in 2021 and published the following year (Prizzon et al., 2022).²

In this note, we examine the perspectives of governments in countries seeking concessional assistance from MDBs, particularly the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank Group's soft window. Some findings presented in this note apply across MDBs; others are specific to IDA.

The questionnaire was distributed to respondents in 71 IDA countries. Results in this note are reported for IDA-eligible countries.³ Respondents were senior government officials in central and line ministries who negotiate grants and loans with MDBs, manage relations and dialogue with MDBs and coordinate projects with MDBs in line ministries. To triangulate the information provided by

¹ Prizzon, A., Zeka, F., Gyuzalyan, H. and Aghjoyan, A. (2026) *Reforming multilateral development banks: perspectives from client countries*. Report. London: ODI Global (www.odi.org/en/publications/reforming-multilateral-development-banks-perspectives-from-client-countries/).

² Prizzon, A., Josten, M. and Gyuzalyan, H. (2022) *Country perspectives on multilateral development banks: a survey analysis*. Report. London: ODI Global (www.odi.org/en/publications/country-perspectives-on-multilateral-development-banks-a-survey-analysis/).

³ Blend countries that can borrow on both concessional and non-concessional terms are treated as IDA countries, as they have yet to officially graduate from concessional finance.

government officials, senior officials in relevant MDB country offices were asked to interpret the views of their government counterparts.

Over 380 responses were received from government and MDB officials across both groups.⁴

⁴ A full description of the methodology, including the research protocol, questionnaire design, country coverage, response rates and weighting approach, is provided in Appendix 1 of Prizzon et al. (2026).

1 Relevance, effectiveness and alignment to national priorities

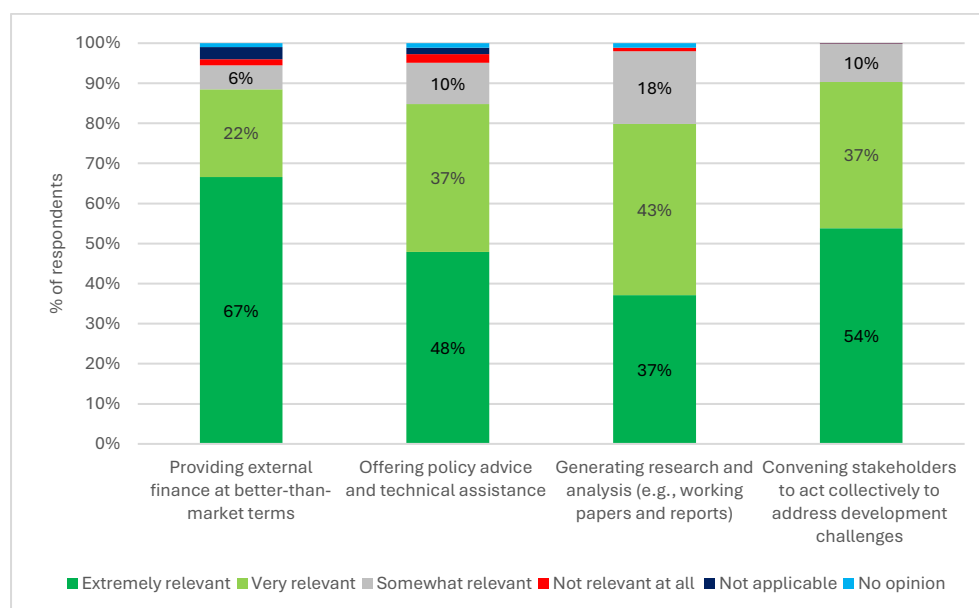
1.1 Relevance of MDBs for IDA countries

MDBs' offer matters for IDA countries. Every dimension – financing at better-than-market terms, the provision of policy advice and technical assistance, the generation of knowledge and research and convening – matters for respondents across IDA countries: at least 80% rate each function as either *very* or *extremely relevant* to the socio-economic development of their country (Figure 1).

Not all functions offered by MDBs are equally important to IDA countries. Providing external financing at better-than-market terms and convening power are perceived as the most relevant functions by IDA country respondents (rated as *extremely relevant* by 67% and 54%, respectively). These are followed by policy advice and technical assistance (rated *extremely relevant* by 48% of respondents). The share falls slightly, to 37% of respondents, for research and analysis.

The importance of concessional financing for IDA countries is particularly pronounced when comparing responses from IDA and IBRD countries. Financing at better-than-market terms matters more for countries borrowing at concessional terms. This is unsurprising and largely attributable to the significant financing needs these countries face, and their limited access to domestic and international capital markets. Among respondents from IDA countries, 89% find financing at better-than-market terms to be *very* or *extremely relevant* to their socio-economic development, compared with 76% in IBRD countries.

Figure 1 Relevance of the roles and functions of MDBs in IDA countries

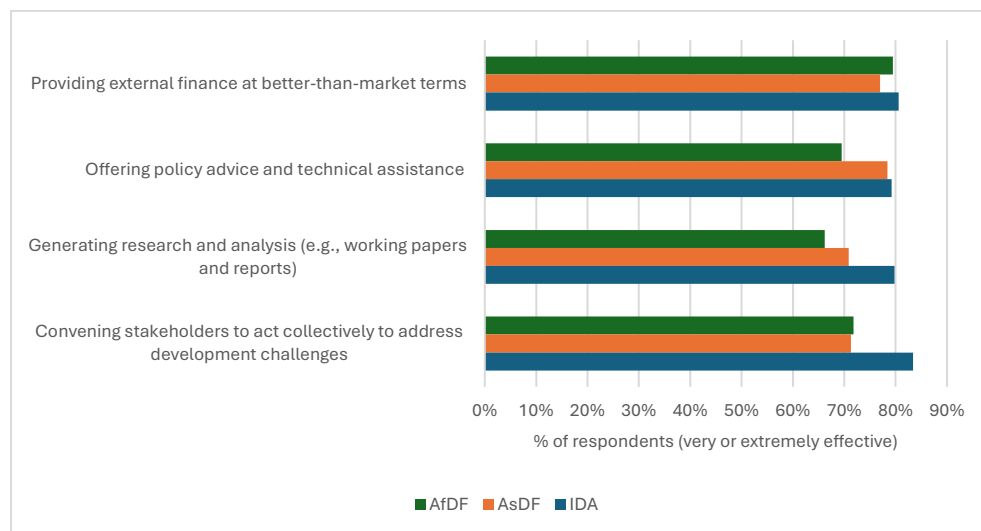


Source: Authors' survey. 381 respondents from IDA countries: 316 government officials and 65 MDB officials. Question: *Looking at what multilateral development banks generally offer, how would you rate each of these items in terms of their relevance for the long-term social and economic development of #country#?*

1.2 Perceived effectiveness of MDB concessional windows

Relative to other concessional windows, IDA is seen as more effective across all four key functions, though the margin varies. On financing at better-than-market terms, IDA and AfDF are rated almost equally (81% and 80% of respondents rating each as *very* or *extremely effective*, respectively), with AsDF close behind, at 77%. On policy advice and technical assistance, IDA and AsDF are similarly rated (79% and 78%), with AfDF slightly behind at 70%. IDA's perceived effectiveness is most pronounced on research and analysis and on convening stakeholders (Figure 2).

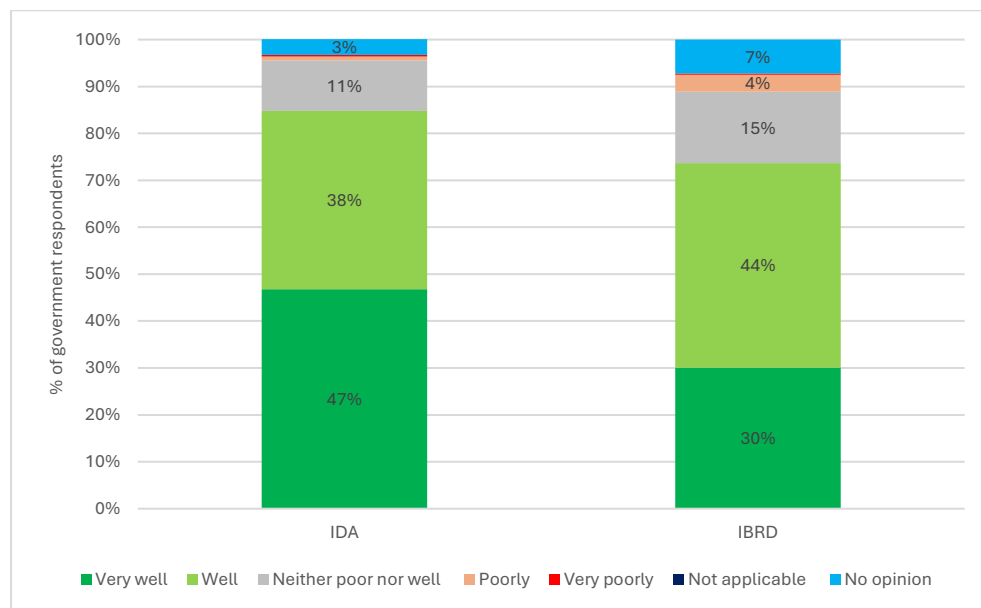
Figure 2 Perceived effectiveness of concessional MDB windows by government respondents



Source: Authors' survey. 123 government respondents for AfDB, 80 for AsDB and 256 for the World Bank. Question: *In your opinion, how effective or not effective is [the MDB] at delivering each function?* Government respondents were asked to rate up to three MDBs, assigned randomly. Government respondents were invited to analyse only the MDBs from which their country can borrow (i.e., those eligible for borrowing).

IDA is also perceived as strongly aligned with country priorities, and scores better than IBRD in this regard. Some 85% of government respondents in IDA countries believe that the World Bank captures their country's priorities *well* or *very well*, compared to just 1% who rate this *poor* and *very poor* – reflecting IDA's profile as a long-standing institution with a broad sectoral mandate and country-level presence. By contrast, 74% of government respondents in IBRD countries consider that the World Bank captures their country's priorities *well* or *very well*, while 4% believe it does so *poorly* or *very poorly* (Figure 3).

Figure 3 How well do IDA and IBRD support country priorities?



Source: Authors' survey. 250 respondents from IDA countries and 148 respondents from IBRD countries. Question: *Thinking about individual MDBs operating in your country, how poorly or how well do the following MDBs support the priorities of #country#?*

2 Financing, policy advice and technical cooperation and operations

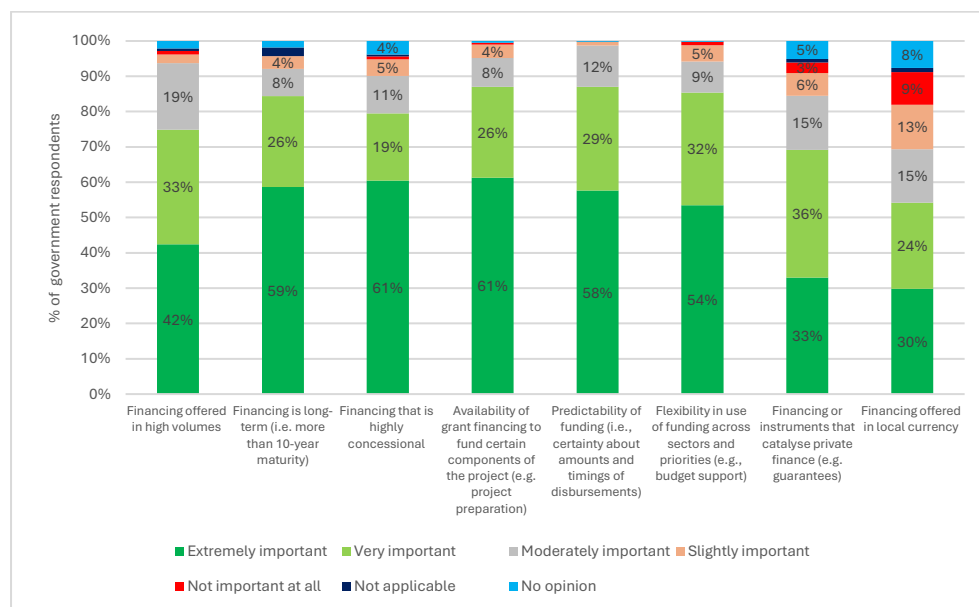
2.1 Financing: relevance and perceived effectiveness

Respondents were asked to rate both the importance of MDB financing characteristics for their country's long-term development, and MDBs' perceived effectiveness in delivering them.

Government respondents in IDA countries consider nearly every dimension of MDB financing either *very* or *extremely* important for their socio-economic development (Figure 4). Predictability of financing and the availability of grants for certain project components are the most valued characteristics (87% rating each as *very* or *extremely* important), followed closely by flexibility in the use of funding across sectors and priorities (86%), long-term financing (84%) and highly concessional financing (80%). Financing offered in high volumes, financing that catalyses private capital and financing in local currency are rated lower in importance, at 75%, 69% and 54%, respectively.

MDBs are perceived to perform well across most of these dimensions: over two-thirds of government respondents in IDA countries rate MDB performance as good or very good across most financing characteristics (Figure 5). MDBs score highest in predictability of financing (77%), long-term financing and the availability of grants for certain project components (76% each), and in highly concessional and flexible financing (74% and 73%, respectively). Performance is perceived as weaker on financing that catalyses private capital (53%) and financing in local currency (43%).

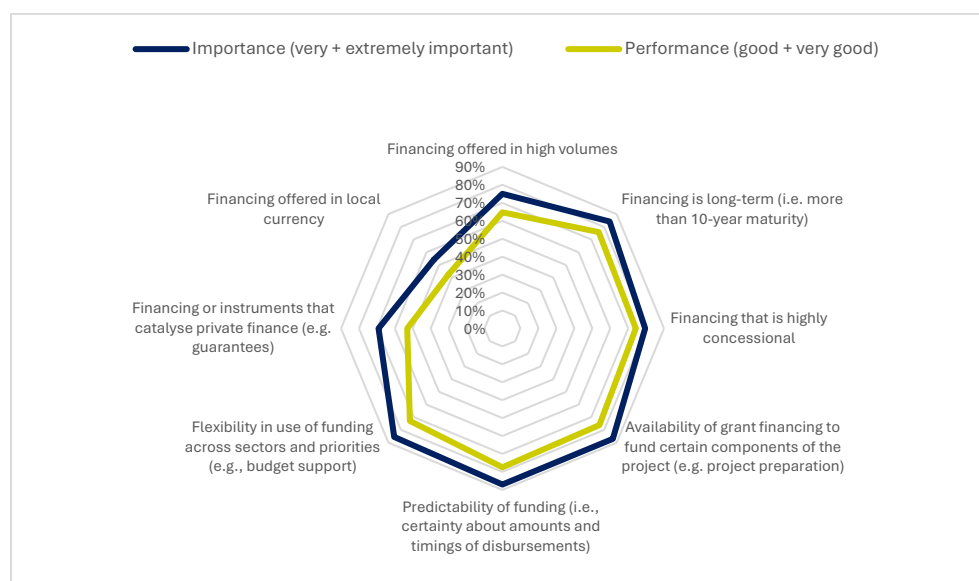
Figure 4 Financing development: importance of financing terms and modalities for socioeconomic development in IDA countries



Source: Authors' survey. 288 government respondents from IDA countries. Question: *Below, we have listed different characteristics of development projects. Could you please tell us how important or not important each of these characteristics is for the long-term social and economic development of #country# on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all, and 5 is extremely important?*

On the dimensions respondents value most, the gap between importance and perceived performance is small. However, financing or instruments that mobilise private finance is rated as *very* or *extremely important* by 69% of respondents, yet only 53% perceive MDBs as delivering *well* or *very well* on this dimension (Figure 5).

Figure 5 Financing – importance vs performance in IDA countries



Source: Authors' survey. Government responses only: 288 responses for importance and 272 responses for performance. Question about the importance of different financing dimensions: *Below, we have listed the characteristics of development projects. Could you please tell us how important or not important each of these characteristics is for the long-term social and economic development of #country# on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all, and 5 is extremely important.* Question for the performance of MDBs in each dimension: *Thinking about these same characteristics, could you assess the performance of multilateral development banks in general in relation to each in #country#? Please use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates very poor performance, and 5 indicates very good performance.*

2.2 Policy advice and technical assistance: relevance and perceived effectiveness

Government respondents in IDA countries find that six features of policy advice and technical assistance offered by MDBs matter for the long-term socioeconomic development of their country, with over 80% of respondents considering them either *very* or *extremely* important (Figure 6). Demand-driven, tailored policy advice and technical assistance (91%) and timely, flexible support (89%) are most valued. Long-term impact, impartiality and lack of bias, highly specialised advice and knowledge of local context and culture round out the remaining features. Notably, over 80% of respondents rate all of these as either *very* or *extremely* important.

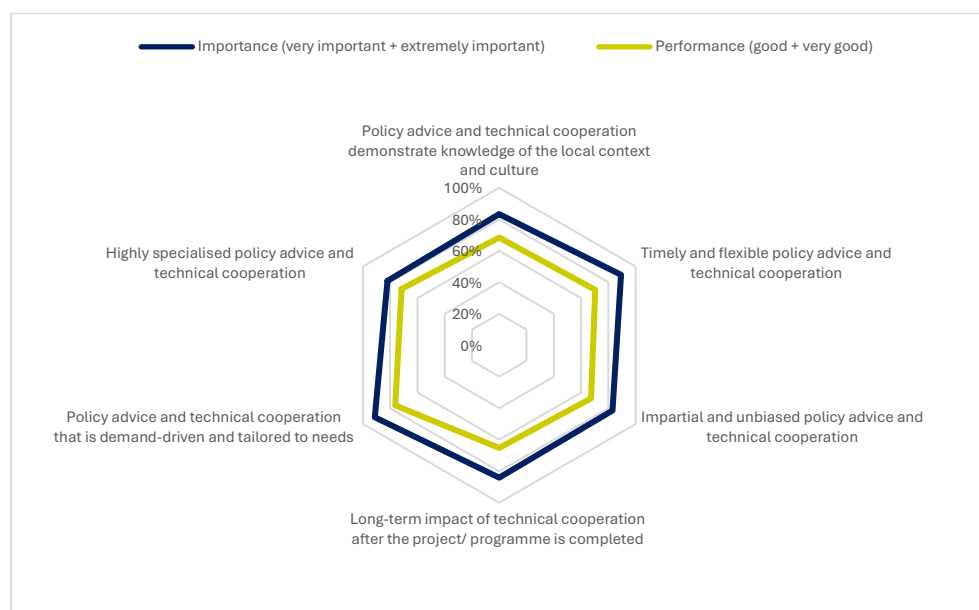
MDBs are perceived to deliver reasonably well across all these desirable features of their policy advice and technical assistance. MDBs score highest in delivering demand-driven, tailored policy advice and technical assistance, with 76% of government respondents rating their performance as *good* or *very good*. Performance is perceived as weakest in long-term impact (65%) and knowledge of local context and culture, despite both being

rated *very* or *extremely important* by 84% and 81% of respondents, respectively.

The main advantage of MDB policy advice and technical assistance, cited by 70% of respondents in IDA countries, is that it helps fill gaps in technical knowledge and expertise. This is followed by the combination of policy advice and technical assistance with grants and loans (48%), and the high degree of specialisation (45%).

The most commonly cited disadvantages to policy advice and technical assistance offered by MDBs are that they are standardised rather than adapted to the country context and culture (31%), and that they are only accessible as part of a project or programme rather than as a standalone offer (30%). While MDBs are valued for their technical depth, responsiveness to country-specific needs remains an area for improvement.

Figure 6 Policy advice and technical assistance – importance vs performance in IDA countries



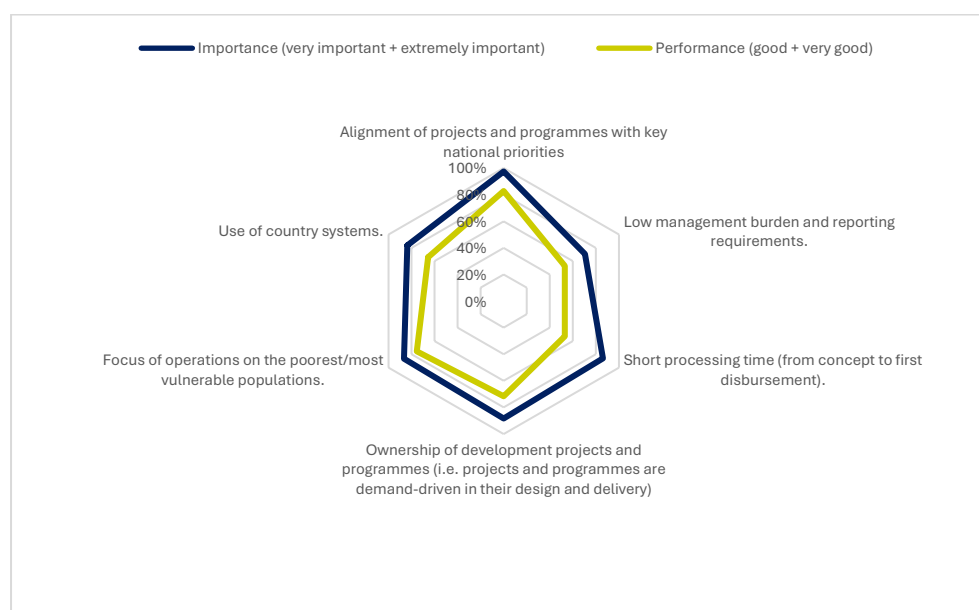
Source: Authors' survey. Government responses only: 277 responses for importance and 269 responses for performance. Question asked to measure importance: *Below, we have listed different characteristics of development projects. Could you please tell us how important or not important each of these characteristics is for the long-term social and economic development of #country# on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all, and 5 is extremely important?* Question asked to measure performance: *Thinking about these same characteristics, could you assess the performance of multilateral development banks in general in relation to each in #country#? Please use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates very poor performance, and 5 indicates very good performance.*

2.3 Development effectiveness and operations: importance and performance

When it comes to the effectiveness of MDB projects and programmes, **97% of government respondents across IDA countries think alignment with national priorities is either very or extremely important**. This is followed by ownership of development projects and programmes by the country (88%), and that operations are focused on the poorest/most vulnerable populations (87%) (Figure 7).

In terms of performance, government respondents think that MDBs align projects and programmes with national priorities (83% of government respondents in IDA countries rate MDB performance on this as *good* or *very good*). This is followed by the MDBs' focus on operations for the poorest/most vulnerable populations (76%). It also emphasizes ensuring ownership of development projects and programmes (i.e. projects and programmes are demand-driven in their design and delivery) (72%).

Figure 7 Development effectiveness and operations – importance vs performance in IDA countries

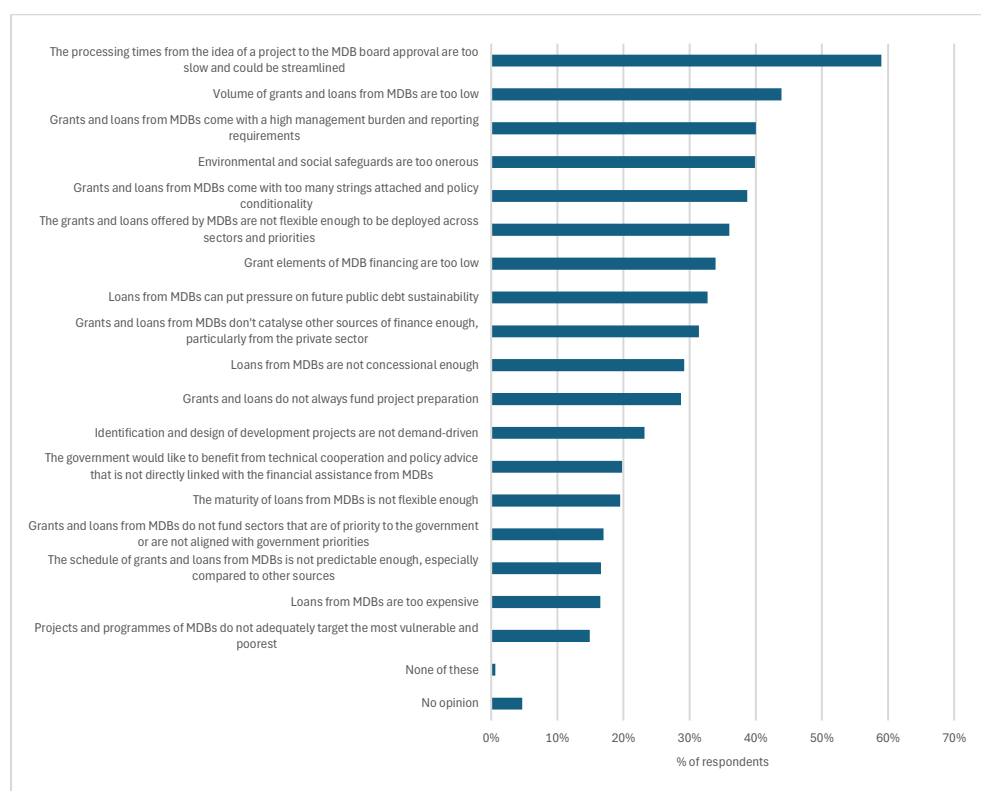


Source: Authors' survey. Government responses only: 280 responses for importance and 272 responses for performance. Question asked to measure the importance of operations: *Below, we have listed different characteristics of development projects. Could you please tell us how important or not each of these characteristics is to the government of #country# for long-term social and economic development, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all, and 5 is extremely important?* Question asked to measure performance of operations: *Thinking about these same characteristics, could you assess the performance of multilateral development banks in general in relation to each in #country#? Please use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates very poor performance and 5 indicates very good performance.*

MDB performance lags most in terms of short processing times, low management burden and reporting requirements for projects and programmes. Only 53% of government respondents in IDA countries rate MDB performance as either *good* or *very good* on both these dimensions. This is very or extremely important for 86% of government respondents in IDA countries.

Respondents in IDA countries tend to see most of the disadvantages of working with MDBs as involving operations rather than financing (Figure 8). The most commonly cited weakness of MDBs in IDA countries is slow processing times, from project conception to board approval (59%). After insufficient volume of grants and loans (44%), the next cluster of concerns is predominantly operational in nature: high management burden and reporting requirements (40%), onerous environmental and social safeguard requirements (40%), excessive policy conditionality (39%) and insufficient flexibility to deploy funding across sectors and priorities (36%).

Figure 8 Disadvantages of MDB grants and loans for IDA countries



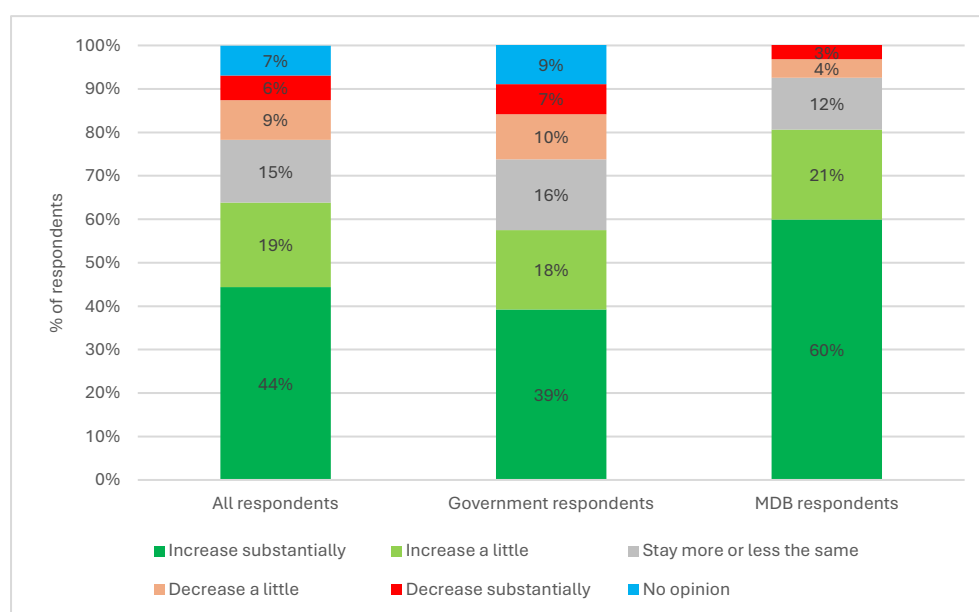
Source: Authors' survey. 323 total respondents: 260 from government officials and 63 from MDB officials. Question for government officials: *What are the main disadvantages of grants and loans offered by multilateral development banks for the #country#? Please select as many as applicable.* Question for MDB officials: *And what do you think the government of #country# sees as the main disadvantages of grants and loans offered by MDBs?*

3 Future demand for assistance

3.1 Demand for MDB financing, policy advice and technical assistance

Most respondents in IDA countries (64%) believe that demand for MDB grants and loans from their own country will increase over the next five to 10 years, compared to only 15% who expect demand to decrease. This is broadly consistent with findings from the 2021 edition of the survey, in which 67% of IDA-country respondents expected demand to increase and 15% expected it to decrease (Prizzon et al., 2022), suggesting that the assessment around demand for MDB financing has remained stable (Figure 9).

Figure 9 Expected future demand for MDB grants and loans in IDA countries



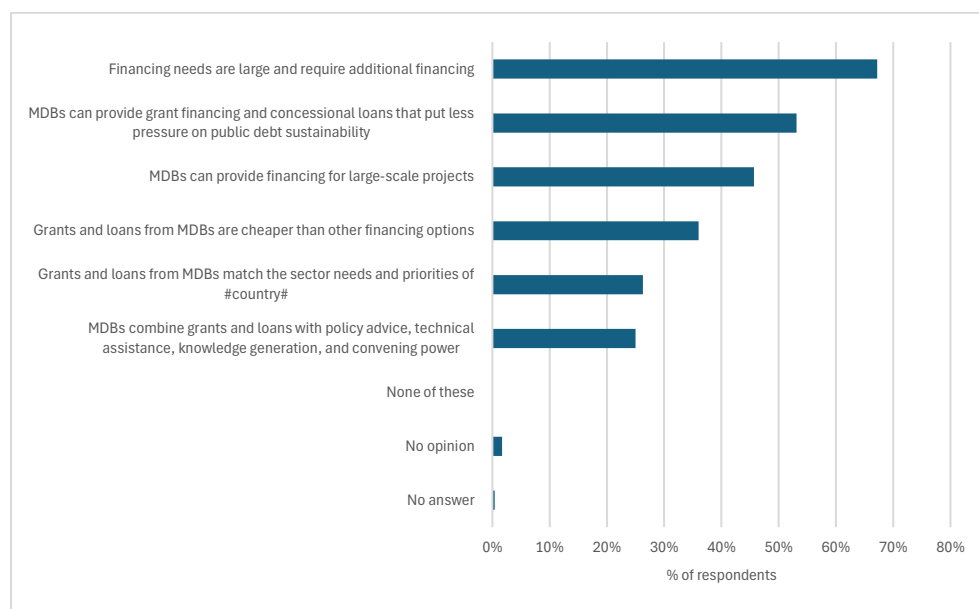
Source: Authors' survey. 323 respondents from IDA countries: 260 from government officials and 63 from MDB officials. Question: *In the next 5 - 10 years, do you think the demand for grants and loans offered by multilateral development banks from #country# will increase or decrease?*

MDB respondents in IDA countries are considerably more optimistic about future financing demand than government officials. While 58% of government respondents expect demand for MDB grants and loans to increase over the next five to 10 years, 81% of MDB respondents share that view – a gap of 23 percentage points. This divergence also holds at the other end of the spectrum: 17% of government respondents expect demand to decrease, compared to only 7% of MDB respondents (Figure 9).

This expected increase in demand is more pronounced in IDA countries than in IBRD countries, reflecting differences in access to capital markets. Respondents from IDA countries are more likely than those from IBRD countries to believe that demand for MDB financing will increase (64% IDA vs 48% IBRD).

The anticipated increase in demand is primarily driven by large financing needs. Respondents from IDA countries think that demand for financial assistance from MDBs is likely to increase primarily in response to large financing needs (67% of respondents selected this option). Just over half of respondents (53%) in IDA countries say grants and concessional loans from MDBs will increase in future because such finance puts less pressure on public debt sustainability (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Why might demand for grants and loans from MDBs increase in IDA countries?

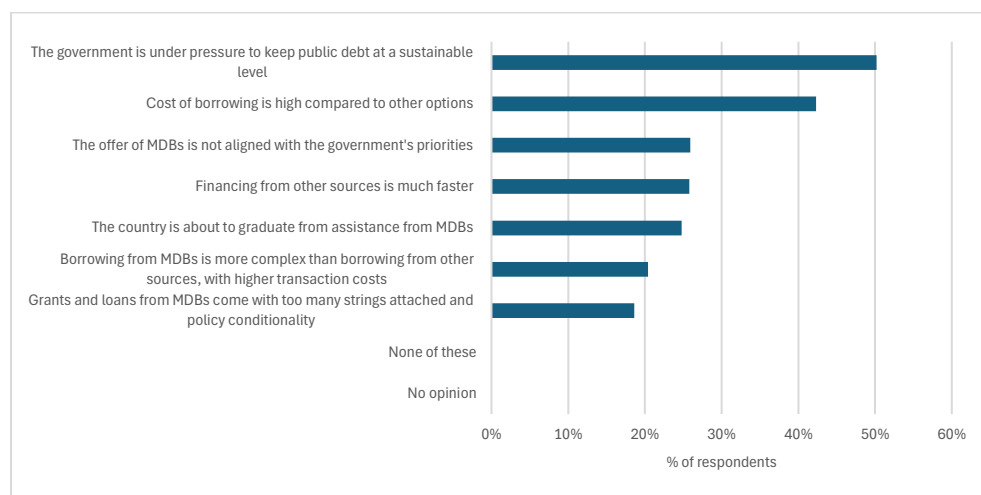


Source: Authors' survey. 255 respondents from IDA countries: 196 from government officials and 59 from MDB officials. Question: *You mentioned that, in your opinion, the demand for grants and loans from #country# will increase or will stay the same. Which of the following factors, in your opinion, will play a role in increasing demand/demand staying the same? Please select up to 3.*

Respondents in IDA countries who expect demand for MDB assistance to decline mainly cite fiscal considerations.

Respondents who believe demand for MDB grants and loans will decline in the medium attribute this to pressure on the government to keep public debt at a sustainable level (50%). This is followed by a perception that cost of borrowing from MDBs is high compared to other options (42%) (Figure 11).⁵

Figure 11 Why might demand for MDB financing fall?



Source: Authors' survey. 44 respondents from IDA countries: 40 government officials and 4 MDB officials – who said that the demand for grants and loans offered by MDBs from their country will decrease. Question: *You mentioned that, in your opinion, the demand for grants and loans from #country# will decrease. Which of the following factors, in your opinion, will play a role in decreasing demand? Please select up to 3.*

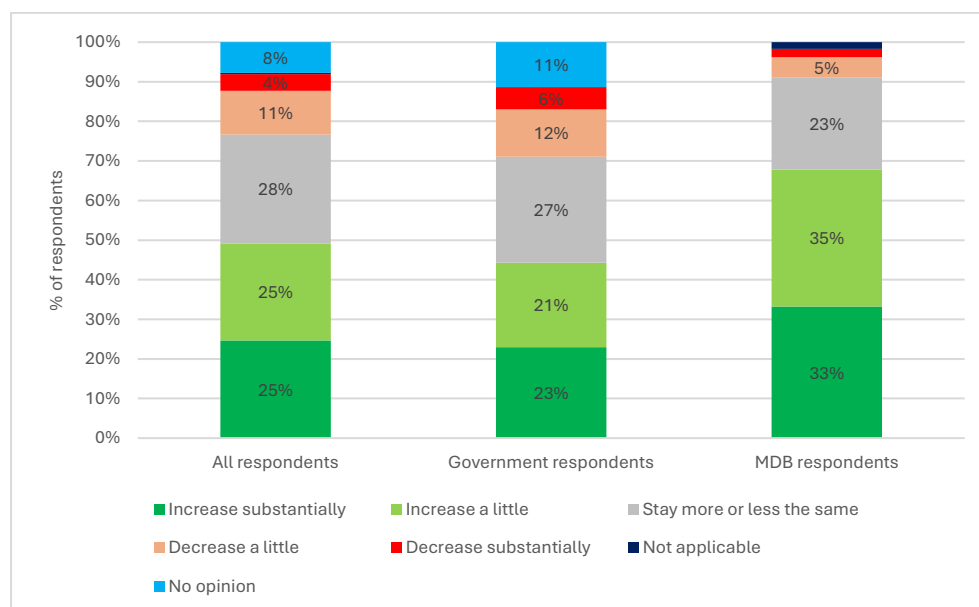
Demand for policy advice and technical assistance from MDBs is also expected to increase, although less strongly than demand for financing. Nearly half of respondents in IDA countries (49%) anticipate an increase (either slight or substantial) over the next five to ten years, compared to only 15% who expect demand to decline (Figure 12). This is broadly consistent with the finding that, while policy advice and technical assistance are widely valued, financing at better-than-market terms remains the main priority for IDA countries when engaging with MDBs. At the same time, advisory services are typically seen as a complementary – albeit still highly relevant – component of MDB support.

Government and MDB respondents in IDA countries diverge notably in their assessment of future demand for policy advice and technical assistance. Among government respondents, 44% expect demand to increase and 15% expect it to decline. MDB respondents are considerably more optimistic: 68% believe demand in the countries they work in will increase, with only 7% expecting a decline. This reflects a tendency for MDB staff to perceive greater

⁵ This finding is counterintuitive, as IDA countries generally face constrained access to external financing and higher borrowing costs in capital markets, while benefiting from concessional MDB financing that is theoretically cheaper than alternative sources.

appetite for their institutions' non-financial services than client governments themselves report.

Figure 12 Expected future demand for MDB policy advice and technical assistance in IDA countries



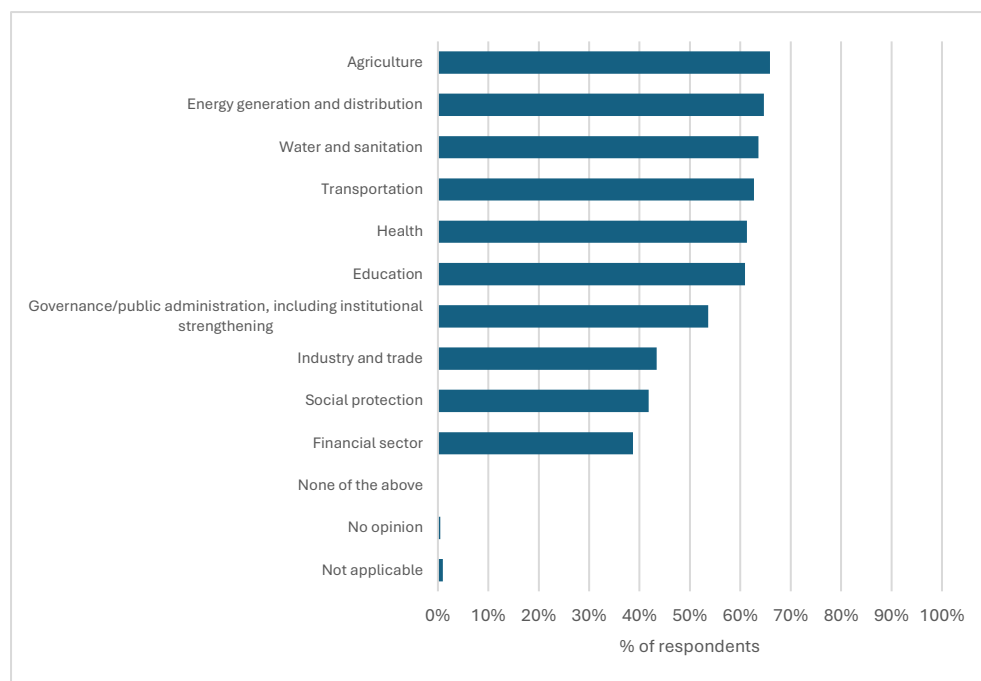
Source: Authors' survey. 314 respondents from IDA countries: 251 from government officials and 63 from MDB officials. Question: *In the next 5 - 10 years, do you think the demand for policy advice and technical assistance offered by multilateral development banks in #country# will increase or decrease?*

3.2 Sectors IDA should focus on

Respondents in IDA countries indicate a broad set of sectoral priorities for World Bank support, spanning both infrastructure and human development. Agriculture (66%), energy generation and distribution (65%), WASH (64%) and transportation (63%) rank among the highest priority sectors, closely followed by health and education (both 61%) and governance and public administration, including institutional strengthening (54%). Sectors such as industry and trade, social protection and the financial sector are less important, each selected by fewer than half of respondents (Figure 13).

This breadth of sectoral priorities distinguishes IDA country respondents from their IBRD counterparts. Respondents in IDA countries tend to prioritise a broader range of sectors than those in IBRD countries, suggesting that they view the World Bank as playing a wider-ranging role in supporting development. By contrast, respondents from IBRD countries appear to see the Bank's role as more focused, concentrated on a smaller number of specific areas.

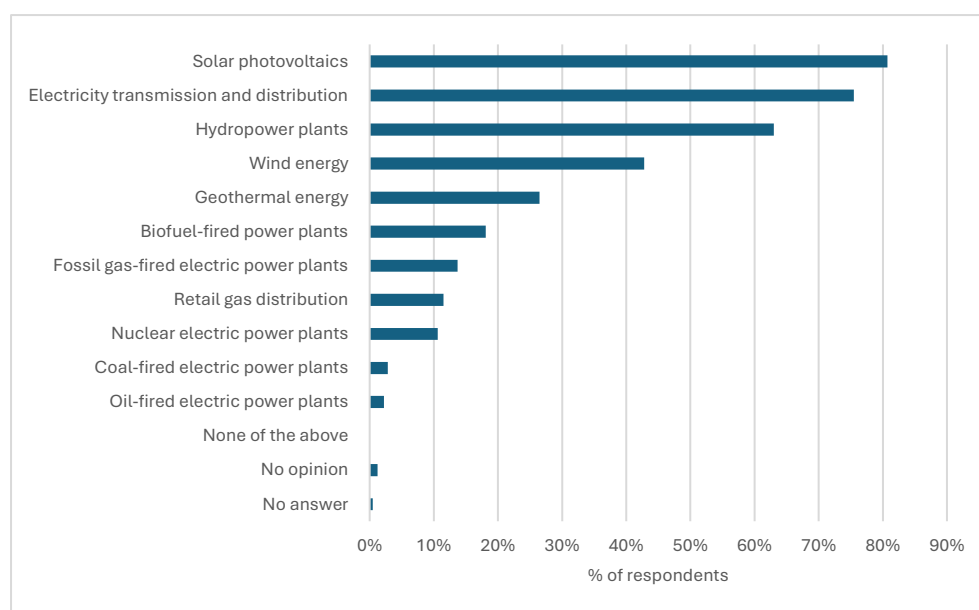
Figure 13 Sectors that IDA should prioritise



Source: Authors' survey. 286 respondents from IDA countries: 264 from government officials and 22 from World Bank officials. Question: *If you were to choose, which sectors do you think the World Bank should prioritise in #country# in the future? Please select as many as applicable.* Question for World Bank officials: *Which areas do you think the government of #country# would like the World Bank to prioritise in the future? Please select as many as applicable.*

Among respondents in IDA countries who identified energy generation and distribution as a priority sector, there is a strong preference for renewable energy projects (Figure 14). When asked where respondents would like energy investments to focus, solar photovoltaics is the most widely prioritised (81%), followed by hydropower plants (63%), wind (43%) and geothermal energy (27%). Non-renewable energy sources receive much lower support: only 14% select fossil gas-fired power plants and 12% retail gas distribution. Other non-renewable sources are chosen by fewer than 3% of respondents. Electricity transmission and distribution also emerge as a key focus, with more than three-quarters of respondents identifying this as a priority within the energy sector.

Figure 14 Priorities in energy and distribution for IDA



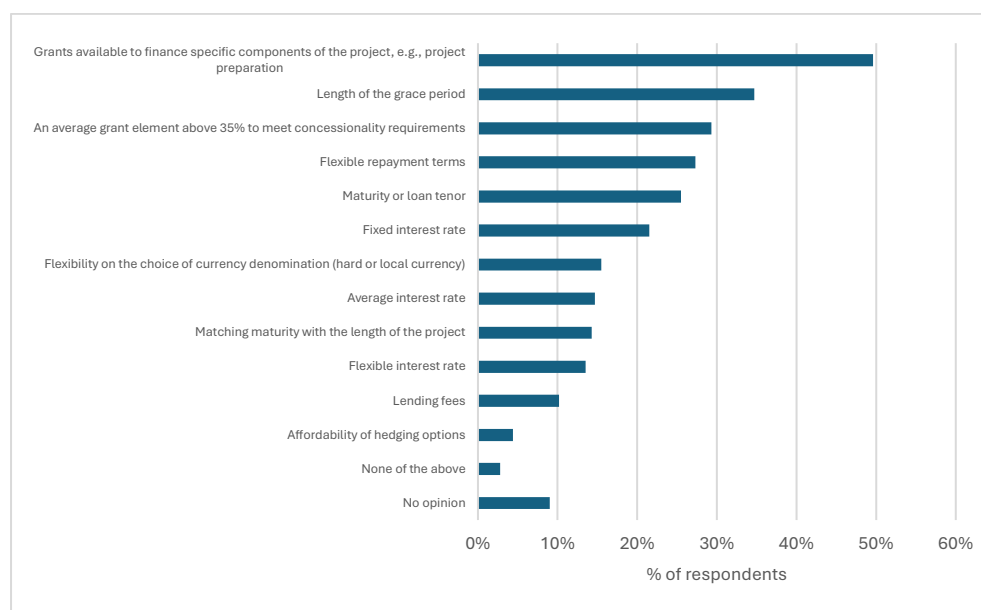
Source: Authors' survey. 265 respondents from IDA countries: 207 from government officials and 58 from MDB officials. Question: *You mentioned [energy generation and distribution]. Which of the following measures, if any, would the government of #country# prefer in this sector? Please select as many as applicable.*

3.3 Terms and conditions of MDB finance

When asked about the most important criteria used to assess the financial viability of a new project or programme by an MDB, **respondents from IDA countries consider the grants available to finance specific components of a project as the most important factor** (50% of respondents in IDA countries select this option). This is followed by the length of the grace period (45%) and the average grant element above 35% to meet concessionality requirements (29%) (Figure 15).

These preferences reflect a clear distinction between what IDA and IBRD countries look for in MDB financing terms – respondents from IDA countries prioritise concessionality; those from IBRD countries prioritise the cost of capital. Respondents from IDA countries are more likely than those from IBRD countries to suggest that the average grant element should exceed 35% (29% compared with 18%). In contrast, respondents from IBRD countries place greater value on average interest rates (29% vs. 15%) and lending fees (30% vs. 10%).

Figure 15 Preferences for financial terms and conditions in IDA countries



Source: Authors' survey. 331 respondents from IDA countries: 266 government officials and 65 MDB officials. Question for government officials: *When you assess the financial viability of a new loan with an MDB and compare it with other financing options, which of the following aspects are the most important when making your decision? Please select up to three aspects.* Question for MDB officials: *When the government in #country# assesses the financial viability of a new loan with an MDB and compares it with other financing options, which of the following aspects are considered the most important ones in the decision? Please select up to 3 aspects.*

4 Improving the operational effectiveness of MDBs

4.1 MDB coordination in IDA countries

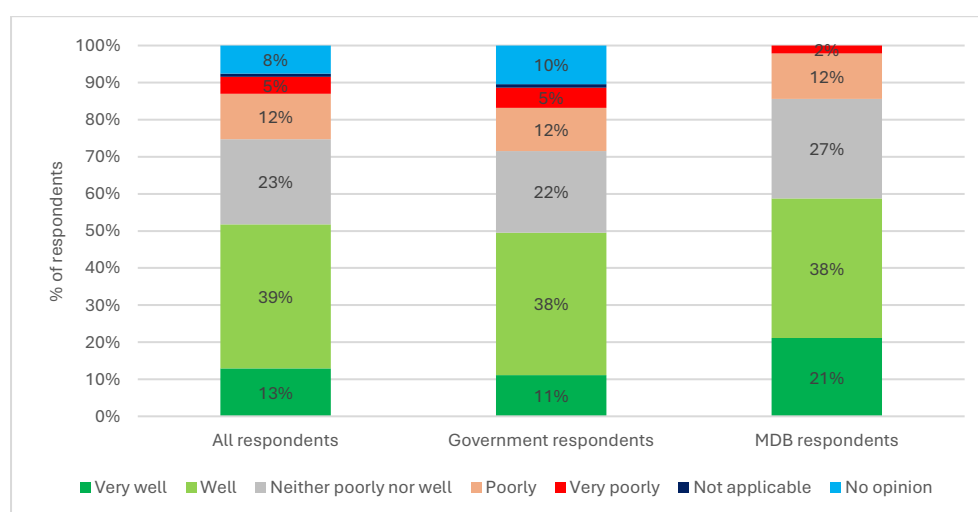
MDB coordination at the country level receives a mixed assessment from government respondents in IDA countries.

Half of government respondents rate coordination among MDBs as good or very good, while 17% rate it as poor or very poor. MDB staff are more positive – 59% of them rate coordination as good or very good, compared to 50% of government officials. This gap is largest at the top end: 21% of MDB staff rate coordination as very good, nearly double the share of government officials (11%) (Figure 16).

Despite efforts to improve coordination, across IDA countries surveyed, assessments of how well MDBs work together have improved only slightly since the first edition of the survey in 2021.

The share of respondents who rate MDB coordination as good or very good has increased from 45% in 2021 to 52% in 2025. The share of respondents in IDA countries who rate MDB coordination as poor or very poor has remained the same between the two editions, at 17%. Africa is the only region where government officials are more likely than MDB staff to rate MDB coordination as poor or very poor.

Figure 16 Perceptions of MDB coordination at the country level



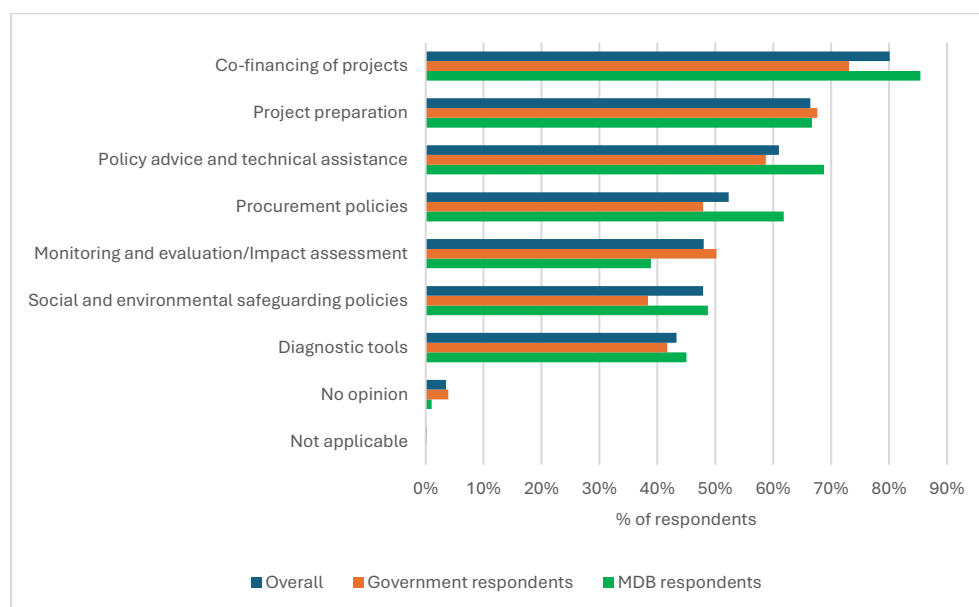
Source: Authors' survey. 312 respondents from IDA countries: 249 government officials and 63 MDB officials. Question: *In your opinion, are MDBs coordinating between themselves poorly or well at the country level?*

When asked at which stages of the project cycle⁶ they would value MDB coordination most, government respondents in IDA countries point primarily to co-financing of projects (80%), followed by project preparation (66%), policy advice and technical assistance (61%) and procurement policies (52%) (Figure 17).

Coordination matters more to IDA countries than to their IBRD counterparts across every stage of the project cycle.

Respondents from IDA countries consistently place greater emphasis on MDB coordination across every stage of the project cycle than their IBRD counterparts. The gap is particularly pronounced for project preparation (66% for IDA vs. 45% for IBRD), procurement policies (52% vs. 36%) and diagnostic tools (43% vs. 29%).

Figure 17 Areas for MDB coordination at the country level across IDA countries



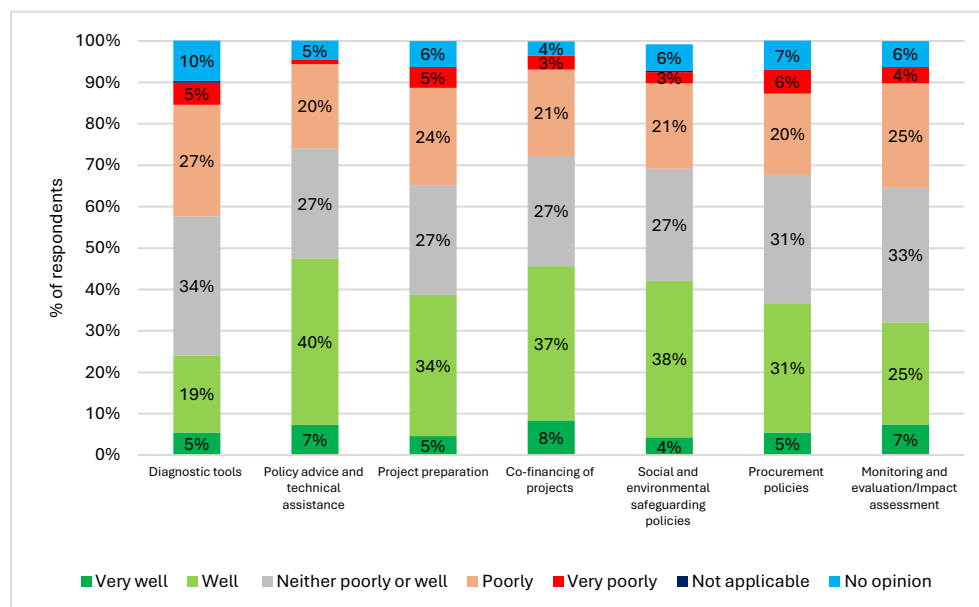
Source: Authors' survey. 312 respondents from IDA countries: 249 government officials and 63 MDB officials. Question: *In your opinion, in which areas should MDBs coordinate among themselves in #country#?*

Despite strong demand for coordination, MDB performance is rated poorly across the board in IDA countries – no dimension is rated good or very good by at least half of respondents. MDBs are perceived to coordinate most effectively on policy advice and technical assistance (rated as either well or very well by 47% of respondents) and co-financing of projects (45%), followed by social and environmental safeguard policies (42%), project preparation (39%) and procurement policies (36%). Less than one in four IDA country respondents think MDBs coordinate well or very well on

⁶ At the country level, MDBs could in principle coordinate across the different phases of the project cycle: diagnostic tools, project preparation, co-financing, policy advice and technical assistance, environmental and social safeguards, procurement and monitoring and evaluation.

diagnostic tools (24%), while 32% think that they do so poorly or very poorly (Figure 18).

Figure 18 Performance of MDBs in coordinating across different areas



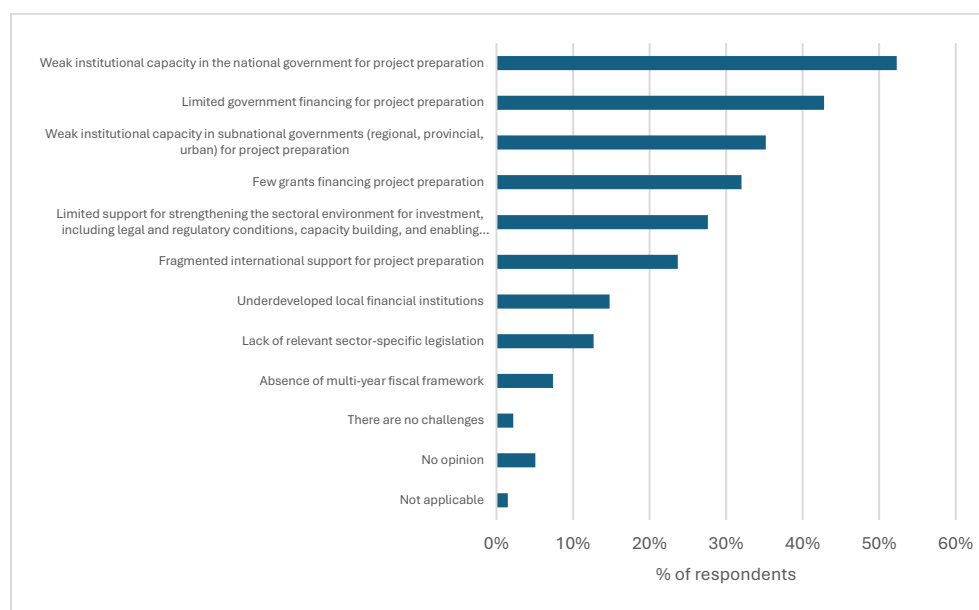
Source: Authors' survey. 134 respondents on diagnostic tools (103 government officials and 31 MDB officials); 195 on policy advice and technical assistance (152 government officials and 43 MDB officials); 200 on project preparation (160 government officials and 40 MDB officials); 244 on co-financing on projects (193 government officials and 51 MDB officials); 151 on social and environmental safeguarding policies (119 government officials and 32 MDB officials); 152 on procurement policies (116 government officials and 36 MDB officials); and 157 on monitoring and evaluation (132 government officials and 25 MDB officials). Question: *Additionally, how poorly or how well would you say MDBs coordinate in each area in #country#?* Numbers differ across functions because respondents were shown only the options selected in the previous question.

4.2 MDB support for building high-quality project pipelines

The main challenges in building high-quality project pipelines in IDA countries are perceived to be institutional and financial.

Weak institutional capacity at the national government level is the most commonly cited barrier (52%), followed by limited government financing for project preparation (43%), weak institutional capacity at the subnational level (35%) and a lack of grant financing for project preparation (32%). One in four respondents (24%) identify fragmented international support for project preparation as a challenge. Structural enablers such as sector-specific legislation, multi-year fiscal frameworks and local financial institution development are cited by fewer than 15% of respondents (Figure 19).

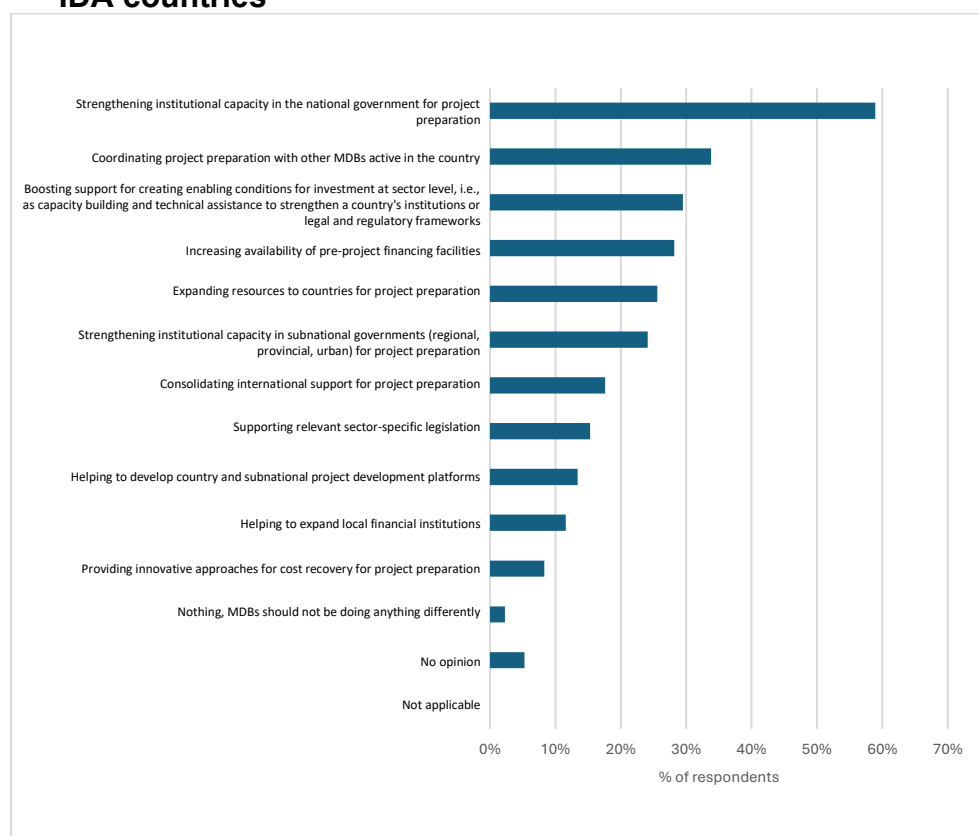
Figure 19 The main challenges to building high-quality project pipelines in IDA countries



Source: Authors' survey. 309 respondents from IDA countries: 246 government officials and 63 MDB officials. Question: In your view, what are the main challenges, if any, to building a strong pipeline of projects in your country? Please select up to three.

To address these challenges, respondents in IDA countries want MDBs to prioritise strengthening institutional capacity in national governments for project preparation – the most commonly cited ask (59%) and the top-ranked challenge. This is followed by better coordination among MDBs on project preparation at the country level (34%), boosting support for enabling conditions for investment at the sector level, including capacity-building and strengthening legal frameworks (30%), increasing availability of pre-project financing facilities (27%) and expanding resources to countries for project preparation (26%) (Figure 20).

Figure 20 Ways MDBs can support robust project pipelines in IDA countries



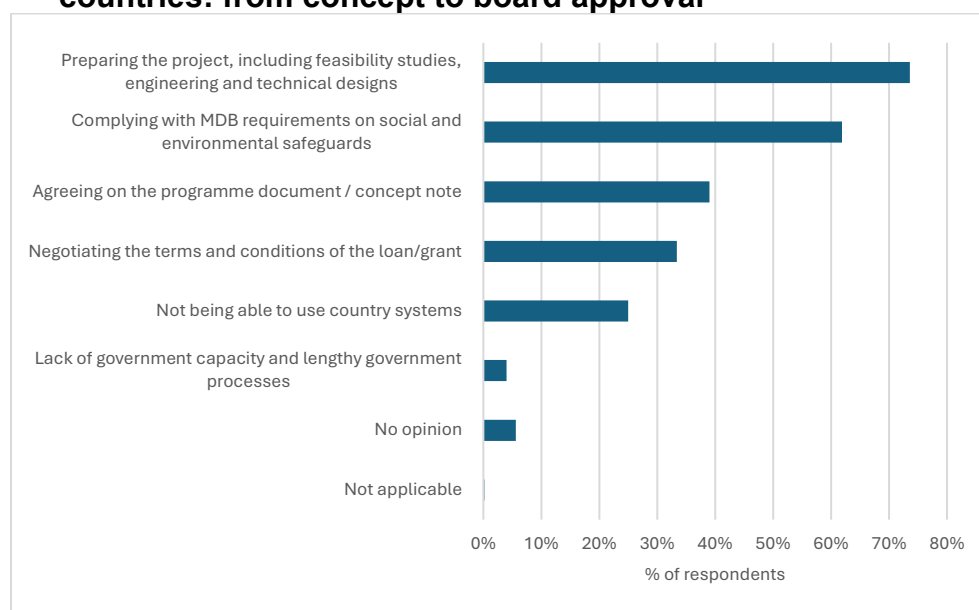
Source: Authors' survey. 310 total respondents from IDA countries: 247 government officials and 63 MDB officials. Question: *Additionally, what, if anything, do you think MDBs should be doing differently to ensure there is a strong pipeline of projects in #country#? Please select up to 3.*

4.3 Streamlining the project cycle

Government respondents in IDA countries broadly view the cycle of MDB projects and programmes as too long. Nearly half (45%) consider the time from concept to first disbursement as very or extremely long, while only 11% consider it not long at all or slightly long (Figure 21).

For the first part of the cycle – from concept to board approval – the main factors that lengthen the project cycle in IDA countries are perceived to be preparing the project, including feasibility studies, engineering and technical designs (74%), and complying with MDB social and environmental safeguard requirements (62%). Agreeing on the programme document or concept note (39%) and negotiating the terms and conditions of the loan or grant (33%) follow. Not being able to use country systems is cited by one in four respondents (25%). At the same time, only 4% identify the lack of government capacity and lengthy government processes as a challenge.

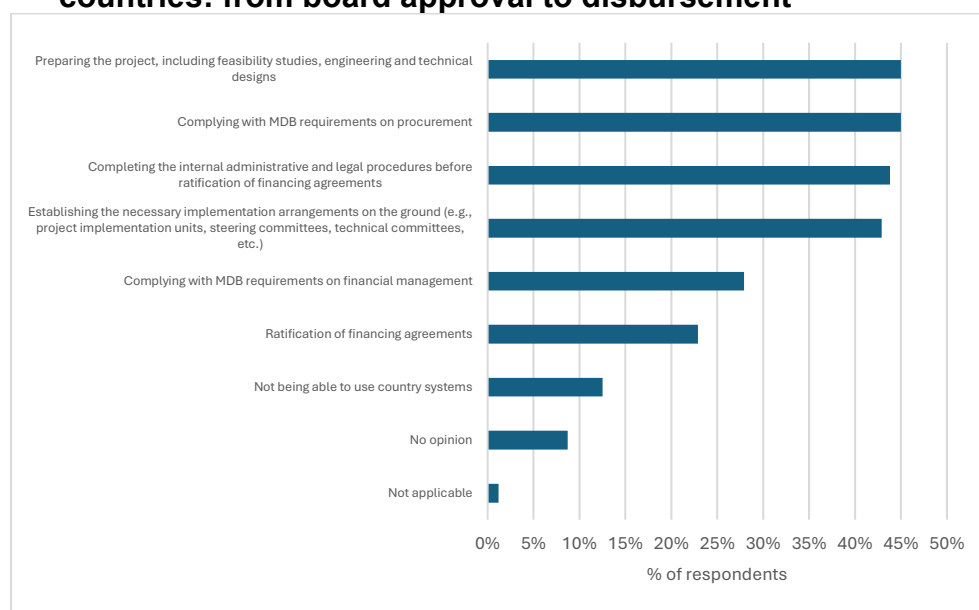
Figure 21 Challenges extending the project cycle in IDA countries: from concept to board approval



Source: Authors' survey. 307 respondents from IDA countries: 244 government officials and 63 MDB officials. Question: *In your view, and considering a typical project, what are the main challenges that unnecessarily extend the project's length, specifically from conception to approval? Please select up to 3.* The option 'lack of government capacity and lengthy government processes' was not included in the survey text but coded based on similar replies under the 'others' option.

The second part of the cycle – from board approval to first disbursement – presents a different picture, with challenges more evenly distributed across factors (Figure 22). The main challenges cited by respondents in IDA countries are project preparation, including feasibility studies, engineering and technical designs (45%); compliance with MDB procurement requirements (45%); completion of internal administrative and legal procedures prior to the ratification of financing agreements (44%); and the establishment of the necessary implementation arrangements on the ground, such as project implementation units (43%).

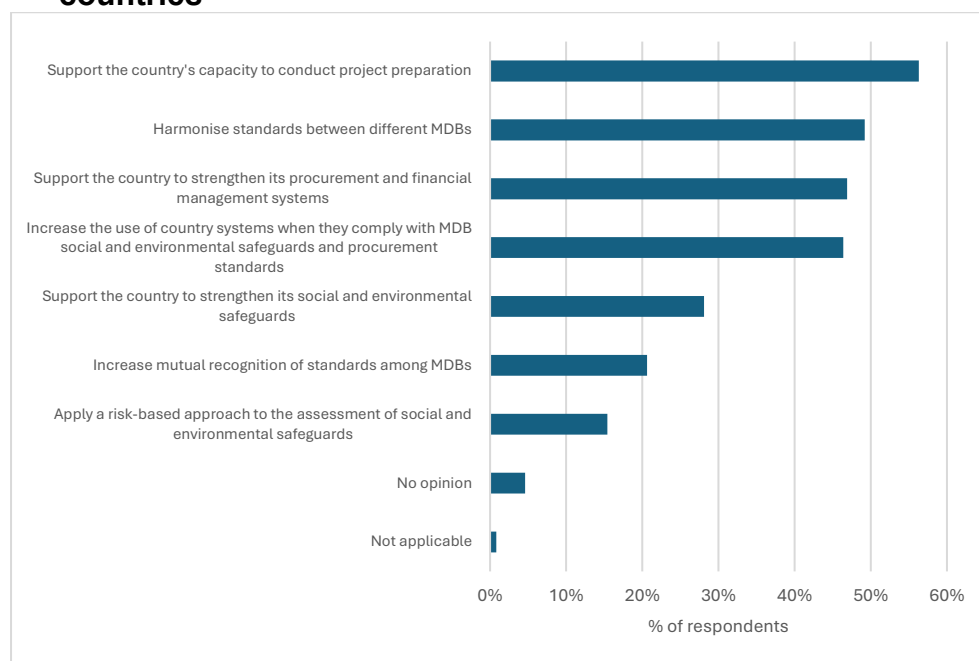
Figure 22 Challenges extending the project cycle in IDA countries: from board approval to disbursement



Source: Authors' survey. 304 respondents from IDA countries: 241 government officials and 63 MDB officials. Question: Again, considering a typical project but now thinking about the stages from the Board approval to first disbursement by MDBs, what are the main challenges that unnecessarily extend the project's length? Please select up to three.

When asked what MDBs can do to reduce the length of the project cycle, most respondents in IDA countries pointed to supporting countries' capacity to conduct project preparation (56%) and harmonising standards between MDBs (49%). These are closely followed by support to strengthen countries' procurement and financial management systems (47%) and increased use of country systems that comply with MDB social and environmental safeguard and procurement standards (46%) (Figure 23).

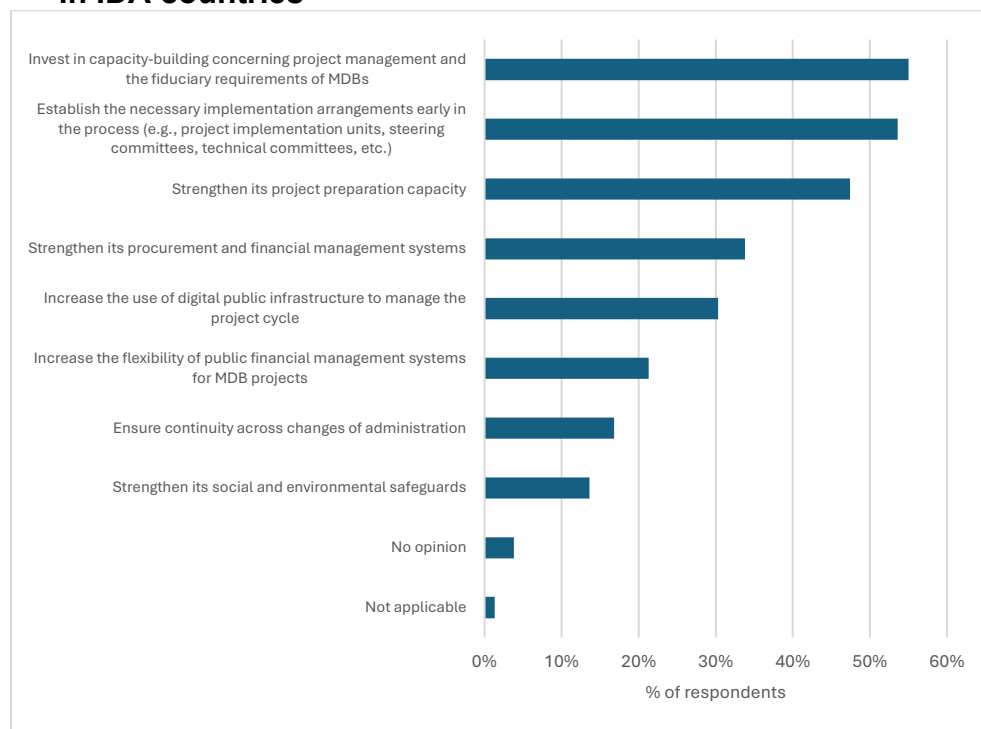
Figure 23 Recommendations for MDBs to reduce the length of the project cycle from concept to first disbursement in IDA countries



Source: Authors' survey. 304 respondents from IDA countries: 242 government officials and 62 MDB officials. Question: *In your view, and again considering a typical project, how can MDBs help to reduce the time from conception to first disbursement? Please select up to three.*

Respondents also identify steps governments can take to shorten the project cycle. **The most commonly cited are investing in capacity-building in project management and MDB fiduciary requirements (55%), establishing implementation arrangements early in the process (54%) and strengthening project preparation capacity (47%).** Only 14% of respondents think that governments should prioritise strengthening social and environmental safeguards (Figure 24).

Figure 24 Recommendations for governments to reduce the length of the project cycle from concept to first disbursement in IDA countries



Source: Authors' survey. 300 respondents from IDA countries: 238 government officials and 62 MDB officials. Question: *In your view, and again considering a typical project, how can the government of #country# help to reduce the time from conception to first disbursement?* The option 'ensure continuity across changes of administration' was not in the questionnaire, but it reflects common answers under the 'others' options.

Conclusion

The findings from IDA country respondents paint a broadly consistent picture: MDBs are highly valued by IDA countries, aligned with national priorities, and considered effective across several dimensions of their offer. However, a clear set of operational and structural weaknesses tempers this positive assessment.

Taken together, the findings illustrated in this briefing paper point to a clear and urgent reform agenda centred on reducing the operational burden, streamlining the project cycle, deepening responsiveness to country context and improving coordination among MDBs at the country level.