



## Approach Paper

# Production, Use, and Influence of IDB's Impact Evaluations



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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DEF	Development Effectiveness Framework
DEM	Development Effectiveness Matrix
DIME	Development Impact Evaluation Initiative
ESW	Economic and sector work
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank Group
IE	Impact evaluation
IL	Investment loan
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MDB	Multilateral development bank
OVE	Office of Evaluation and Oversight
SG	Sovereign-guaranteed
TC	Technical cooperation

## I. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 **For any development organization, knowledge about what works and what does not is essential to inform decisions and, consequently, increase effectiveness.** For this reason, the international community has promoted the use of diverse methods of evaluation to assess the effectiveness of its work. During the last two decades, impact evaluations (IEs), which address the problem of causal inference by rigorously controlling the factors that might account for an observed change, have become an important tool to inform the design and implementation of programs. The collection of organized data for IE has, in many instances, facilitated the accountability of public interventions, and the data themselves are a source of learning. When properly justified, designed, and implemented, IE can facilitate scaling up interventions, adjusting program costs or benefits, canceling inefficient interventions, or determining policy alternatives for a specific objective.
- 1.2 **In recent years, multilateral development banks (MDBs) have adopted and implemented IEs more systematically to measure their results, promote more learning, and lead to recommendations about how to work better.** A good example is the Development Impact Evaluation Initiative (DIME) at the World Bank, launched in 2005, which provides funding and technical assistance to undertake IEs. The initiative contributed to increasing the number of completed IEs at the World Bank from 28 in 2005 to a total of 215 in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Other MDBs have followed suit, providing new funding for IE and revising mandates to require these evaluations.<sup>2</sup> Loans and technical cooperation (TC) operations have become regular sources of funding for IE. Also, the use of technical support from academic specialists<sup>3</sup> has become more common. The results of IEs are generally presented and publicized through different institutional and academic channels.
- 1.3 **The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has also embraced the use of IE to inform its operations and has been a primary supporter of the use of IE in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).** The implementation of large-scale conditional cash transfer programs in LAC in the early 2000s was a key factor in the emphasis on the impact evaluation of programs.<sup>4</sup> In 2004, the IDB Board of Directors indicated that the Office of Evaluation and Oversight (OVE) would start undertaking systematic IEs of IDB projects.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, a series of changes under the IDB realignment provided the institution with the opportunity to reshape its approach to development effectiveness, including an increased emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank DIME website, accessed in January 2017.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the Asian Development Bank, because the new General Increase in Capital identifies the need to expand the practice of IE, TC funds have been approved for this purpose.

<sup>3</sup> Among the specialized support used are the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, Center for Global Development, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, Innovations for Poverty Action, and Center for Evaluation for Global Action, among others.

<sup>4</sup> An IDB loan was used for the funding of PROGRESA in Mexico. Levy and Rodriguez (2005) describe how this program was designed, implemented, and evaluated. Mexican authorities created the conditional cash transfer program using evidence produced in the decades leading up to the program on the dynamics of household allocation of resources. However, they did not know the specific effect of the program, and an IE was designed for this purpose. The evidence collected with the evaluation was key in replicating the model in other countries and in promoting its continuity in Mexico, mainly through IDB support.

<sup>5</sup> See RE-238, RE-293, RE-308.

IE. Specific changes included the creation of a department dedicated to development effectiveness—Strategic Planning and Development Effectiveness (SPD)—and revised project preparation processes.

- 1.4 **The current IDB institutional arrangement, with SPD providing support to teams and the Development Effectiveness Framework (DEF) in place since 2008, aims at overcoming the institutional challenges of producing IE.** In particular, the DEF created better incentives for producing IE. The purpose of the DEF is to improve the Bank’s effectiveness by “generating a body of knowledge about ‘what works’ in meeting the region’s development challenges” (Development Effectiveness Overview 2008/09). The DEF better defined the roles and responsibilities of units within the Bank regarding development effectiveness, and it introduced the Development Effectiveness Matrix (DEM), an instrument to assess operations’ ex ante evaluability. The DEM identified a series of monitoring and evaluation requirements and rated operations on their compliance with these requirements. The system explicitly recognized the importance of addressing operations’ effectiveness in a causal manner, by rewarding operations with evaluation plans that proposed IEs. It was designed to overcome the institutional challenges to evaluating projects, creating incentives and resources for enforcing accountability.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.5 **MDBs’ increased emphasis and spending on IE also creates a fiduciary responsibility to account for the results and cost-effectiveness of these efforts, particularly regarding their role in promoting development.** To answer this need for accountability, independent evaluation offices are starting to include specific assessments of the production, use, and influence of IEs in their work plans. The World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) published in 2013 a comprehensive evaluation of the World Bank Group’s IEs<sup>7</sup>. At the IMF, the Independent Evaluation Office reviewed the role of research at the Fund.<sup>8</sup> Although the IMF by nature does not finance operations that can be evaluated through IE, the approach used in the evaluation of research shares many of the same characteristics as the evaluation approach in IE. At IDB, SPD is tasked with following up on the evaluations proposed.
- 1.6 **This evaluation proposes to analyze the production, use and influence of the IEs included in IDB loan, TC, and economic and sector work (ESW) operations approved between 2006 and 2016.** Since the first push for the use of IEs at IDB, many IEs have been conducted and their results made public. Therefore, the time is ripe to take stock, examining how IDB decides on which evaluations should be done, and assessing IEs’ process, funding, and impacts. OVE will analyze not only the production of IEs and the system in place for this purpose, but also the use and influence of the completed evaluations. OVE will also take into consideration the evolution of the IE proposed over time, by analyzing the proposals included in the LDs, TCs and ESWs.

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<sup>6</sup> Institutional challenges include the bias towards outputs, risks of negative results, and inadequate budget allocations; see Pritchett (2002), Levine (2005), Center for Global Development (2006), Blattman (2008), Karlan (2016). It is generally difficult to produce evidence on the effectiveness of policies and interventions. For instance, many IEs have lacked funding because many borrowers took the view that evaluation was a public good, and that therefore the benefits would not accrue fully to member countries.

<sup>7</sup> See Independent Evaluation Group (2013).

<sup>8</sup> See IMF Independent Evaluation Office (2011).

## II. IMPACT EVALUATION PRODUCTION IN IDB LOANS, TCs, AND ESWs

- 2.1 **The first challenge in assessing IE at the IDB is to identify what was produced.** The Bank does not have a budgetary classification for IEs, so there is no mechanism by which the production of IE can be easily determined on the basis of budgetary outlays. Furthermore, the fact that IEs can be produced in several contexts makes it difficult to identify them on the basis of activity.<sup>9</sup> SPD has started to work on a centralized database of IEs financed by the Bank, which was the basis of the data presented in the DEO (2015) report. When possible, OVE compared the results of our own methodology for identifying IEs with this database.
- 2.2 **The number of IEs proposed in loans has increased considerably since 2009.** To estimate the number of IEs included in sovereign-guaranteed (SG) operations, OVE carried out a lexical analysis of the official English version of loan proposals<sup>10</sup> for all loan operations (investment loans, policy-based loans, and reimbursable TCs) approved between 2006 and 2016—a total of 1,087 loan proposals.<sup>11</sup> Of this set, 288 (26%) included an IE.<sup>12</sup> As Figure 2.1 shows, the annual share of all loans that proposed an IE out of all approved loans increased from an average of 13% in 2006-2010 to 39% in 2011-2016, peaking at 46% in 2013.<sup>13</sup> Randomized control trials are considered in 26% of cases (93 evaluations), and the rest mention a quasi-experimental method, including IV, matching, and synthetic controls.<sup>14</sup> Figure 2.2 shows the distribution of methodologies and the increase in experimental evaluations during the last five years.

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<sup>9</sup> IEs are produced as pure research products, as inputs into project preparation, as part of stand-alone sector work, and ex post as part of the Bank's normal project evaluation cycle.

<sup>10</sup> Lexical analysis was run on these documents using the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA, via an automatic search for mentions of the terms "impact evaluation," "evaluate the impact," "impact assessment," "experimental evaluation," and "pilot evaluation." This was done in English and, with the respective translations, for the documents in Spanish.

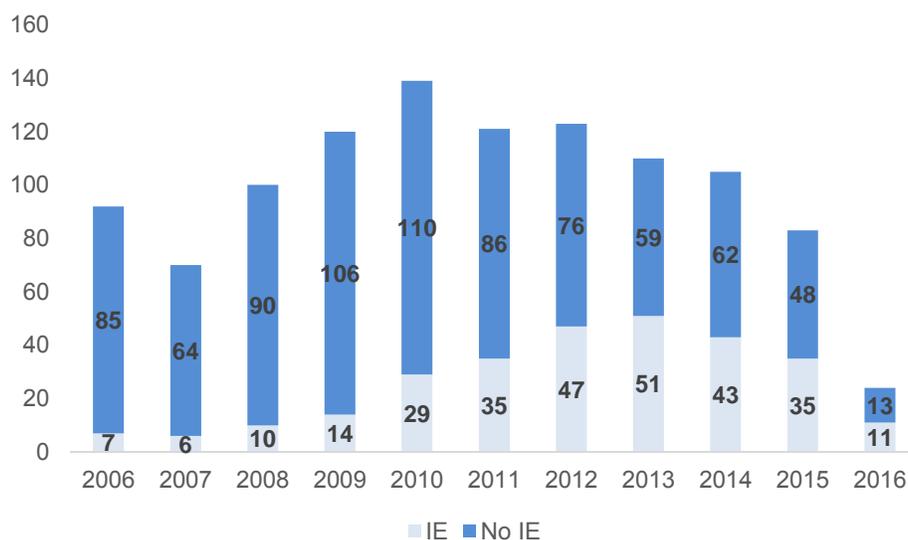
<sup>11</sup> This excludes 24 project preparation facility loans with no documents available in IDB systems. Non-sovereign-guaranteed instruments could also not be included in the analysis as their documentation protocol does not match that of the public sector window.

<sup>12</sup> Some operations share an IE and others plan several, for a total of 359 evaluations.

<sup>13</sup> This compares to an average of 10% portfolio coverage in World Bank operations approved between FY07 and FY10, according to the evaluation prepared by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group in 2013. More recent data are not available.

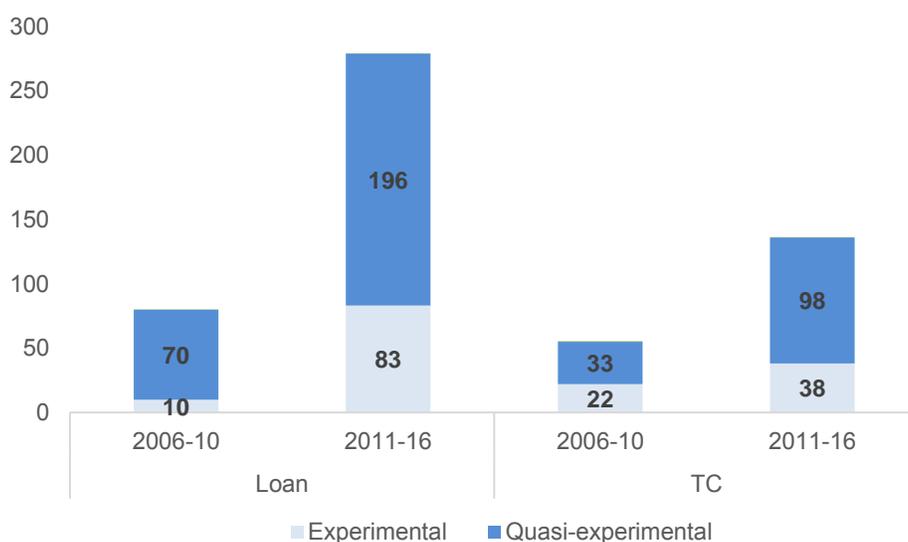
<sup>14</sup> OVE includes all operations that mention an IE following the terminology used in the loan documents. However, in OVE's final evaluation a distinction will be made between self-classified IEs and IEs that comply with the econometric characteristics of each method.

**Figure 2.1. SG loan operations with or without IE by approval year (2006-2016)**



Source: OVE, based on documents available in IDB-SEC.

**Figure 2.2. Prevalence of IE methodologies by approval period (2006-2016)**



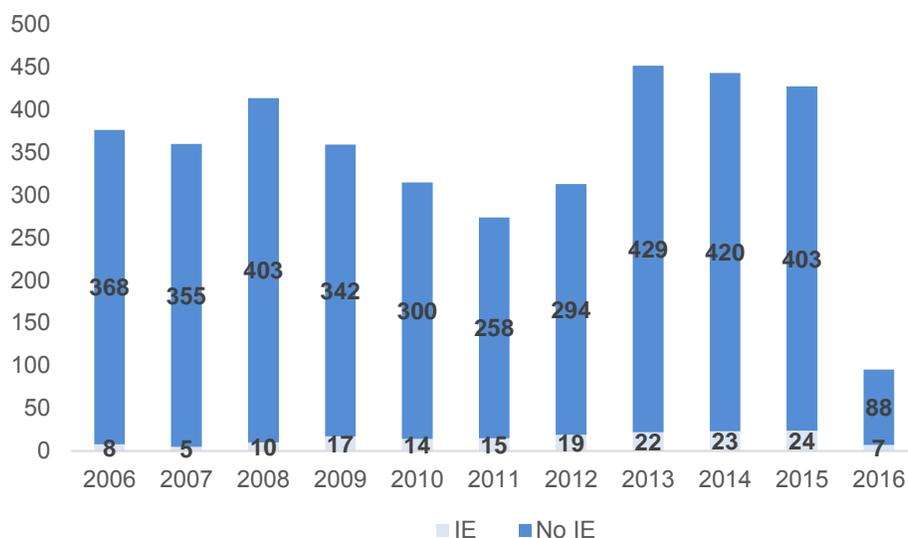
Source: OVE, based on documents available in IDB-SEC. The total number of IEs exceeds 288 as several operations mention more than one IE.

**2.3 OVE's methodology leads to a close match of identified loan operations with SPD's database.** The database prepared by SPD for the DEO (2015) includes 292 loan operations since 2009 that mention the elaboration of an IE at the approval stage. OVE's own database matches 88% of this total; the loans identified

only by OVE were mostly approved before 2009, and the loans identified only by SPD are mostly micro or macro simulations, which the present report does not consider.

2.4 **OVE also takes into consideration the TCs and ESWs that included an IE as a component.** This required a comprehensive electronic review of IDB documents.<sup>15</sup> A small number of TCs finance IEs, representing between 1% and 7% of the total (Figures 2.3 and 2.4).

Figure 2.3. TC operations with or without IE by approval year

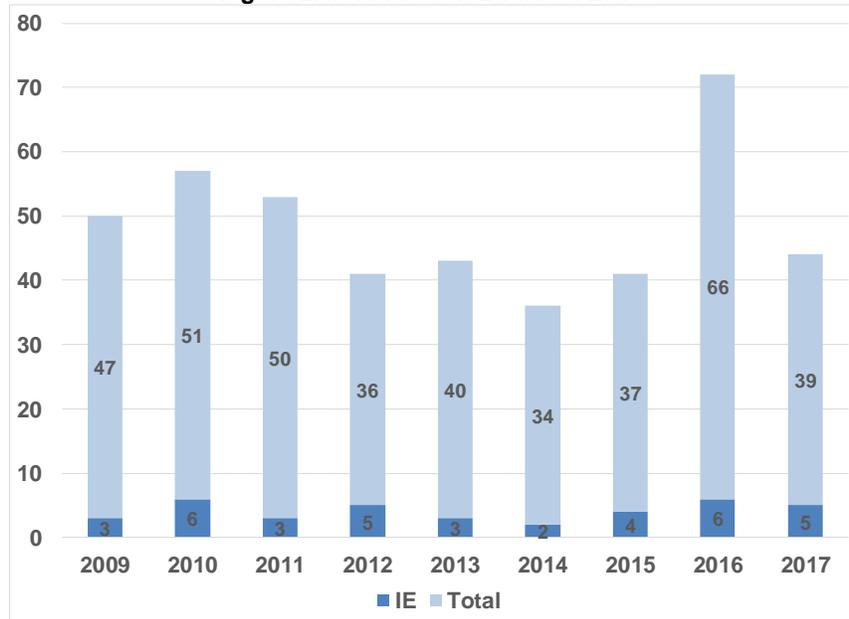


Source: OVE based on the available documents in IDB-Docs.

Note: Includes only TCs with available TC documents up to September 20, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> The total number of IDB TCs (including TCs financed through trust funds and special operations) approved during the evaluation period is 4,544. We identified the TCs related to IE topics from this universe through two steps: (i) obtaining profile documents for all the IDB TCs, and (ii) searching for specific key words related to IE in the profile documents. For the first step, given the large number of TCs and their limited and non-uniform documentation available in IDBDOCs, we developed a VBA script to download selected TC documents from the IDBDOCs web services. This selection was based on their document type classification, including “TC-Document,” “Agree-TC,” “TCP,” “TCB,” and “PO,” in that order of prioritization and availability. This procedure allowed us to recover 3,821 TC profile documents (84% of the total). For the second step, we applied the same methodology as for the IDB loans (lexical analysis), which allowed us to find 164 TCs that financed IEs (4% of total). We used a similar procedure for the ESWs approved since 2009 (when ESW was launched).

Figure 2.4. Number of IE-related ESWs



Source: OVE, based on the available registries of Cognos.

### III. EVALUATION SCOPE

- 3.1 **The evaluation will cover the IE included in SG loans and TC operations approved, and in ESW undertaken, between 2006 and 2016.** The evaluation will include loan operations that explicitly proposed an IE in the content of the loan proposal and TCs and ESWs that mention IE as one of their components. The period will allow OVE to compare the years before and after the introduction of the DEM in 2008. Using three types of operations—loans, TCs, and ESWs—will facilitate the analysis of their complementarities.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Evaluation objective and questions*

- 3.2 **This overarching question for this evaluation is to what extent IDB’s promotion of impact evaluations has enhanced the Bank’s development effectiveness.** The promotion of IEs within IDB has had two main goals: (i) enhancing learning to inform IDB’s operations and (ii) adding to the general knowledge on development and capacity to undertake IE in the region. The ultimate objective of each of these goals is development effectiveness.
- 3.3 **To address the overarching question, OVE will analyze IDB’s production of IEs, their quality, their use, and, to the extent possible, the influence that they are having or can have.** The analysis of production will focus on technical aspects as well as processes. OVE will assess the selection of IE topics and, for each IE, the methodology used, the questions addressed, and the IE’s alignment with the knowledge agenda of the respective division in the Bank. OVE will also look at how IEs are budgeted and carried out. The analysis of use and influence will focus on a stratified sample of IEs produced, either through loans or through TCs, in each

<sup>16</sup> Project evaluations that were financed in a different way or that used resources of one of these three sources but was proposed afterwards, will not be included in the analysis.

year and sector. Finally, OVE will analyze whether capacity for conducting IE in LAC has been strengthened during the period when IDB's IEs were produced.

**3.4 The timeframe of the analysis will allow for an overall understanding of the evolution of the IDB's institutional changes and the impact of the IEs produced.** The questions and proposed methodologies that will guide this evaluation are listed in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1. The evaluation of IDB's IEs**

Evaluation criterion	Evaluative question	Method
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the institutional context in which IEs are produced?</li> <li>✓ What career incentives related to IE production face the Bank's specialists?</li> <li>✓ What is the funding and budget process for IE production?</li> <li>✓ What mechanisms are used for IE quality control?</li> <li>✓ To what extent are clients involved in the definition of the IE portfolio?</li> <li>• How efficient is the process of preparing IE?</li> <li>✓ How much are IEs expected to cost?</li> <li>✓ How much do IEs cost, and how do the costs compare with the benefits (to the extent that it is possible to assess them)?</li> <li>✓ How expensive are they compared to the IEs of other institutions?</li> <li>• How many IEs have been produced, and what incentives affect the overall output?</li> <li>✓ How many IEs have been proposed?</li> <li>✓ How many IEs have been completed?</li> <li>• What is the overall quality of the IEs produced by the IDB?</li> <li>✓ Are the IEs meeting quality standards?</li> </ul>	<p>Desk review. Analysis of evaluations proposed and conducted by specialists. Analysis of data in the Bank's internal information system. Semi-structured interviews with government agencies and authorities and IDB specialists. Analysis of completed evaluations by consulting firm.</p>
Use and Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How relevant are the IEs produced by IDB?</li> <li>✓ Are the evaluations properly measuring projects' results?</li> <li>✓ Are they targeting questions that are relevant for the region and the Bank?</li> <li>✓ Are they helping IDB staff better design and execute projects?</li> <li>✓ Are they helping close key knowledge gaps in the region?</li> <li>✓ Are they using relevant methodologies?</li> <li>• What is the influence of the IEs produced by the IDB?</li> <li>✓ Who are the users of these IEs?</li> <li>✓ Is the evidence collected by them used in the design of new operations?</li> <li>✓ Are they influencing the design of policies in sectors and countries supported by the IDB?</li> <li>✓ In what sense have these evaluations contributed to generate knowledge, both in academia and more broadly?</li> <li>• Is the IDB building capacities for IE in client countries?</li> <li>✓ Are local officials being trained to design and use IEs?</li> </ul>	<p>Desk review. Survey and semi-structured interviews with Bank specialists, executing agencies, and government authorities. Citation analysis.</p>

- 3.5 **The evaluation will use a variety of methods, including surveys, semi-structured interviews, and desk reviews.** An essential step has been the creation of the database described in the previous section. The Bank is currently working to implement a formal system to track IEs.
- 3.6 **An important value-added of this evaluation will be the documentation of the current institutional setup for IE.** OVE will attempt to document and describe the incentives that are in place, the funding and budget process, the existence of quality control mechanisms, the engagement of clients, and other factors that might play a role in the production of IE.
- 3.7 **Two important notes should be made regarding unit of analysis and the role of OVE.** OVE has classified IEs by relying on loan, TC, and ESW documents. However, OVE is aware that there might be overlap as some evaluations might be funded with resources from different funds. The final unit of analysis to be used is the actual IE, either proposed or completed, even if it may have been funded by more than one source within IDB. In addition, although in the past OVE has been a protagonist in the production of IE at the IDB, the evaluation proposal and the results to be presented explicitly exclude OVE because of the potential conflict of interest that would arise from this office's evaluating itself. Therefore, the only way OVE enters the analysis is when OVE publications are used in constructing the universe of evaluations and evaluators. This universe then forms the basis from which results are reported for the Bank.
- 3.8 **One of the most challenging aspects of this evaluation is to assess the quality of the IEs.** Assessing the quality of analytical products is a complex task. The prevailing consensus is that such an assessment is best done through a peer review system, in which a group of professionals assess different proposals regarding the adequacy of data and method given the questions asked, as well as the relevance of the questions asked and the contribution to the literature.<sup>17</sup> At the IDB, different variants of this peer review method have been used to assess the quality of analytical work and the quality at entry of Bank lending products.<sup>18</sup> For this evaluation, OVE will hire a specialized consulting firm, which will be in charge of peer-reviewing a sample of the IEs completed and a sample of proposals of ongoing IEs. OVE will complement that work with a bibliographic review of published materials. Since these materials have already undergone a process of quality selection, they can be considered a measure for the quality of evaluations. The drawback to this approach is that it looks mostly at a subset of products—those with an academic audience.
- 3.9 **Equally challenging is the assessment of influence. The literature has no clear and detailed analysis of how the results from IEs are used in the practice of policy-making.** The contemporary policy environment increasingly demands that agency officials use the best information available when making decisions about policies, programs, and practices. However, it is not clear how

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<sup>17</sup> Such a review process is the basis of qualitative review of academic work in all academic journals. It is also the basis for selecting research funded by all major funding agencies—public and private—throughout the world.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, OVE (2006) and OVE (2010) for the assessment of analytical and sector work.

different types of evidence are ranked in the decision-making process.<sup>19</sup> OVE will approach this question through a series of semi-structured interviews with the agencies involved in the IEs conducted by IDB. OVE is also interested in studying how evaluations are being used by staff members, and how they integrate with the project cycle and the programming process. This assessment is challenging, as IEs serve different purposes and audiences simultaneously. A good starting point is to analyze the use of evaluative results by staff members involved in IDB operations. For this purpose, a set of semi-structured interviews and a survey will be performed with staff members across VPC, VPS, and VPP.

#### IV. TIMELINE

- 4.1 **The evaluation will be led by Oliver Azuara and Anna Crespo (team leaders), under the direction of Cheryl Gray (Director, OVE).** The team is composed of Cesar Bouillon, Veronica Gonzalez, Alejandro Palomino, Johanan Rivera, and Florencia Alejandre. The draft of the evaluation is expected to be ready in early July 2017 and distributed for Board discussion in September.

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<sup>19</sup> Sutcliffe (2005) notices how departments and units within governments tend to make hierarchical judgments in choosing what evidence to use, and where and how to use it. Likewise, in a systematic assessment of what kind of information is used by 12 agencies across the United States, Means et al. (2009) show how consulting varied sources is a common practice.

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