

highlights

Overview

- 1** This evaluation assesses how well the World Bank Group convenes international partners to act collectively on global issues critical to its mission. It concludes that the Bank Group's comparative advantages give it strong convening power, which it uses on many development issues. In so doing, it meets the demands of partners and shareholders and stays highly relevant as a global actor.
- 2** The Bank Group often makes strong and relevant convening contributions, and there are many examples of effective Bank Group convening efforts. The Bank Group is more likely to be effective when the external context is favorable; internal capacities are strong; and initiatives have clear objectives, operationalization in country programs, and sustained engagement.
- 3** The Bank Group has room to become a more effective convener through more selective scoping of its convening contributions, improved processes to manage convening initiatives over their life cycle, and stronger alignment with country programs.

LEADING ON GLOBAL ISSUES is a core pillar of World Bank Group strategies. International collective action is needed to provide policies, investments, and public goods that respond to global risks. This evaluation explores what global issues the Bank Group convenes on, what factors drive its convening choices, and what factors determine its convening effectiveness.

It defines *convening* as “bringing together relevant actors to act collectively to address global or regional development challenges.” It looks at both instances where the Bank Group leads and where it supports convening, including its role in multilateral forums and where it acts as co-convenor. The evaluation looks at convening both for global public goods (for example, development data, business standards, protecting the global environment) and on other global development issues with need for collective action (for example, gender, fragile countries). The evaluation used a scorecard framework to systematically collect evidence across policy areas on dimensions such as demand for Bank Group convening, efforts by other actors, Bank Group internal capacities, convening roles and mechanisms, and results achieved. To convene successfully would lead to one of three broad outcomes: shared understanding, or changes in positions and attitudes; shared solutions, or negotiated changes in standards, policies, strategies, and financing practices; and shared implementation, or setting up funds, programs, and partnerships to finance and coordinate country work. The evaluation’s scope omits convening within individual countries to better focus on the Bank Group’s global convening role.

Why the Bank Group Convenes

Many examples of Bank Group convenings have internal impetus, driven by incentives to stay relevant and develop business. For example, senior management gave impetus to the open data, human capital, and impact investment projects.

There is also high external demand for the Bank Group’s convening. Many urgent development challenges require coordinated global action. Much convening demand comes from donor countries, who also finance a good share of the work, and from multilateral partners including the United Nations and the Group of Twenty. Communiqués from the Group of Seven and the Group of Twenty show high demand across many sectors and issues. There are also proposals in which the Bank Group plays a coordinating role among multilateral development banks, helping them work more as a “system” with harmonized practices and procedures. There is an increased demand for the convening role of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), especially on how to scale up private sector finance for development.

The Bank Group brings clear strengths and a strong reputation to its global work. Convening efforts tend to be highly visible. They are often tied to politically prominent requests, are sometimes linked to major funds, and usually involve partnerships with political leaders and executive-level representatives from partner organizations. Leaders from partner organizations were consistent in

describing the Bank Group's strengths as a convener. The notable strengths were its global reach, country presence, ability to work cross-sectorally, and central place in international development networks. In addition, partners mentioned its ability to channel funding and design and apply innovative financial instruments and (for the World Bank) its capacity for data and research. These leaders think it is crucial to bring these strengths to bear on the particular development agendas on which they are engaged.

What and How the Bank Group Convenes

The Bank Group convenes with many partners on most sectors and issues relevant to development. The World Bank convenes the most on health, finance, and climate change issues, but it is hard to identify any single agenda where it does not have a presence. In part, this is due to its agility in responding to new and emerging priorities. Its expanded engagement on forced displacement issues, starting in 2016 at the request of donors, the United Nations, and other partners, is an example. IFC, for its part, partners most often with private sector actors, in addition to other multilaterals, bilaterals, and foundations.

The Bank Group is a more active convener on issues where key partners already share a common understanding of the need for a collective action solution than when interests diverge. The evaluation did not identify many examples of the Bank Group convening to overcome divergent interests, except in tackling climate change. For climate change, the Bank Group used knowledge, financing, and advocacy to bridge divergent interests and positions between developed and developing countries.

There are occasional tensions with other organizations over roles and mandates. A commonly held perception emerging from interviews with external partners was that the World Bank can sometimes overstep its mandate or claim agendas that other organizations are already working on. Some partners expressed a wish that the World Bank would be more comfortable being a constructive player within initiatives rather than always leading. The evidence suggests that instances in which the World Bank plays a constructive supporting role do exist, perhaps more than in the popular perception. For example, the World Bank has supported many coalitions on the climate change agenda, co-convened global health initiatives with the World Health Organization, and partnered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on forced displacement responses.

The choice of convening mechanism depends on the collective action goal to be achieved:

- Data, research, and analytical work can influence positions and attitudes and foster shared understanding. The World Bank has successfully used analytical work to tackle sensitive issues in social and economic development terms, sometimes sparking policy changes.
- Promoting common norms and standards can influence the behavior of an entire sector and lead to shared solutions. Successful examples include the Open Data Initiative and poverty measurement. IFC has built on the success of the Equator Principles to convene on different business norms and standards, some of which have been widely adopted by other organizations.

- Collaborative platforms help many actors come together to create shared solutions. The Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, for example, has successfully galvanized momentum in reducing malnutrition.
- Financial intermediary funds add value as vehicles for financing shared implementation. The Bank Group has much influence during the design and setup stages but plays a much smaller convening role in the ongoing operation of most financial intermediary fund-supported programs.

Effectiveness of Bank Group Convening

This evaluation does not provide an overall assessment of the cumulative impact of the Bank Group's convening efforts. This is impossible because of the vastness and variety of convening initiatives and the lack of comprehensive data. The evaluation did, however, assess convening effectiveness on a case basis. The yardstick for assessing effectiveness was the expected outcomes and the Bank Group's intended roles and contributions.

The Bank Group often makes strong and relevant convening contributions, and there are many cases of effective Bank Group convening efforts. The Bank Group is more likely to be effective when

- The external context is favorable: the initiative has potential to add significant value by addressing an important problem, crisis, or urgent need; there is strong demand for Bank Group engagement; and the issue aligns with Bank Group core goals and mandates;
- It has adequate resources; established expertise and experience; data and knowledge work that can inform and persuade; units dedicated to the issue; and a unified stance on the issue; and
- It engages with clear objectives, buy-in and engagement of senior champions; embeds the topic in select country programs; and sustains efforts over time. Many of the Bank Group's most visible and effective programs are long-lived, allowing staff expertise, external networks, and reputation to accumulate. On the contrary, some short-lived engagements leave interventions without the necessary depth and consistent attention to achieve the intended outcomes.

Constraints to Effectiveness

The Bank Group has room to become a more effective convener. Shortcomings of Bank Group convening efforts relate to factors specific to each initiative, and to three systemic factors related to the way the Bank Group selects, manages, and reports its convening activities.

Selectivity. It is hard for the Bank Group to delimit its convening activities, and exits are difficult. Addition of new convening programs and activities within existing issue areas occurs across many sectors. For example, the World Bank has shown agility in responding to emerging priorities, including on Ebola, forced displacement, and fragile situations. It had a justified rationale for engaging in nearly all the convening initiatives examined for this evaluation, yet its priorities have

sometimes been drifting. The challenges in remaining focused and selective must be seen against the backdrop of an increasingly large and demanding development agenda.

The multiplication of agendas strains internal capacity. Weak selectivity and limited resources were themes across many cases examined by the evaluation. Often the World Bank made relevant contributions, but impacts fell short because of insufficient attention, resources, duration, and country program links. Some prominent initiatives of both the World Bank and IFC appear understaffed. In interviews with staff and managers, budget constraints and the ensuing scarcity of staff resources were the most frequently cited barrier to convening success.

The World Bank has no formal organizational process for selecting and prioritizing convening. There are no formal criteria for selectivity. Most groups use a case-by-case approach to decide on what to convene and what role to play. Exits are difficult: Very few global engagements have exit strategies or sunset clauses. As a result, the World Bank must make a deliberate decision to exit or close, which is difficult to do because of vested interests and attached funding streams.

IFC has a centralized, top-down selectivity approach where senior management selects and approves convening initiatives. The centralized approach has kept IFC's convening portfolio small; aligned with stated Bank Group and IFC priority areas, including gender equality, climate change, and mobilizing private finance; and focused on business development. Evidence suggests IFC's focus and sustained attention in relatively few issues have helped achieve results.

Results orientation. The World Bank's 2014 operating model reforms strengthened global convening capacities in some ways. Global Theme Groups ensure coherence and lead on major convening agendas. Some Global Practices have created specialized global teams or have Global Lead positions who lead convening work streams.

However, oversight and accountability for convening work have room to improve. No system tracks the convening portfolio. Some convening initiatives lack explicitly stated objectives, and management lacks data and tools to monitor and manage convening portfolios over their life cycle and measure the results. Convening relies extensively on trust funds, which account for 64 percent of global engagement budgets. This can weaken the selectivity and accountability that the regular budget process otherwise would impose. Ongoing efforts to strengthen life-cycle management of trust funds and financial intermediary funds could be expanded to cover the broader convening portfolio, not just the financing instruments.

Global-country links. Successive corporate strategies since 2001 have emphasized the Bank Group's ability to link global work to country engagements. This ability is a comparative advantage that motivates donors to channel trust funds to the World Bank. Many global convening efforts need to be reflected in country work to be fully effective. Even so, both the World Bank and IFC have room to strengthen internal processes for linking global work with country operations.

The World Bank could improve the links between its global and country work. The Bank Group supports far more global issues and priorities than can practically be included in country programs. In practice, some Global Themes—such as Gender and Climate Change—receive consistent country

program consideration because these are tracked by corporate indicators. Some other global initiatives struggled to get traction in country programs because Regions and country clients had little say in the selection and design of those initiatives. Consulting with regional units in selecting global engagement priorities could be a pragmatic approach to channel client country needs and demands, and to filter out proposals that are unlikely to see much uptake in country programs.

Conclusions

Summing up, the Bank Group's comparative advantages give it strong convening power, which it uses on many development issues. The Bank Group meets the needs and demands of shareholders by convening on many relevant initiatives and, in so doing, stays highly relevant as a global actor. The high demand for Bank Group convening is grounded in the Bank Group's strong reputation and unique strengths. There are many examples of successful Bank Group convening efforts, including on the Equator Principles, Scaling Up Nutrition, the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research, carbon finance, financial inclusion, development data, poverty measurement, river blindness, and several other global health partnerships.

However, the Bank Group can further improve its convening effectiveness. Based on the evidence and findings of this evaluation, the Independent Evaluation Group recommends that senior management act in three areas with strong and systemic influence on the Bank Group's convening performance: more selective scoping of Bank Group convening engagements and contributions, new or improved processes to manage convening initiatives over their life cycle, and stronger alignment with country programs.

Recommendation 1. Scope engagements and contributions to major global convening initiatives more deliberately. This could include the following:

- Setting up formal and explicit selectivity criteria that cascade from the corporate level to individual vice presidential units and Global Practices. These criteria should be used for deciding the entry, role, types of contributions, funding, and exit of major global convening efforts. Criteria may include relevance to corporate priorities; potential links to and support for country-level work; if the Bank Group's proposed role is based on its comparative strengths; and if the convening leads to a clear public good or global collective action.
- Make sure that global convening efforts have clear goals and exit plans and that the Bank Group's role(s) and contributions are clearly defined.

This recommendation applies to major convening initiatives as defined in box 4.1.

Recommendation 2. Enhance how the World Bank and IFC's internal systems and processes support managing major convening initiatives over their life cycle. This should include stronger internal systems to track, measure, and manage convening initiatives, for example by

- Monitoring periodically tracked indicators to measure progress and inform course corrections.

- Implementing periodic reviews. Conduct internal reviews of ongoing major convening initiatives periodically and promote timely exits. These reviews could cover relevance to current strategic directions, effectiveness, rationale for engaging, and resourcing.
- Introducing or improving self-evaluations of convening initiatives and Bank Group convening performance.

Recommendation 3. Improve links between the World Bank’s global and country work, for example by

- Consulting Regions more systematically when selecting major global convening initiatives.
- Improving how country programs assess their progress and results on major global issues.

Acting on the evaluation’s findings could improve the Bank Group’s impacts and reputation. The evaluation’s recommendations aim at three important outcomes: a Bank Group that is intentional about its roles, manages its contributions better, and fosters more links between global and country work. Beyond these recommendations, chapter 4 also sums up lessons and suggestions for other ways in which the Bank Group could strengthen its convening contributions. Through strong convening, the Bank Group assists its partners in achieving better development outcomes and protects and enhances its reputation.