Report Number: ICRR0023875

1. Project Data

Project ID	Project Name
P146152	GA- Skills Development and Employability
Country	**Practice Area(Lead)**
Gabon	Education

L/C/TF Number(s)	Closing Date (Original)	Total Project Cost (USD)
IBRD-85820	31-Dec-2021	65,981,161.90
Bank Approval Date	**Closing Date (Actual)**	
10-Feb-2016	30-Apr-2023	

	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	100,000,000.00	0.00
Revised Commitment	63,123,725.16	0.00
Actual	65,981,161.90	0.00

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The Project Development Objective (PDO) was to: "improve the effectiveness of vocational training, short-term skills development, and entrepreneurship programs in key growth sectors in the Gabonese Republic" (Financing Agreement, p. 5). This is consistent with the PDO statement in the design document (PAD, para. 23 and footnotes 11, 12 and 13), which provides additional information on the PDO intent and measurement: (i) effectiveness was to be measured by graduation or employment (including self-employment); (ii) short-term skills development was defined as “less formal, generally short-term training programs for graduates of higher education and technical programs, as well as school-leavers, who are unemployed; and (iii) targeted key growth sectors included: "green" growth, wood processing, food processing agriculture, information, communication and technology (ICT), and construction. For the purposes of this ICR Review (ICRR), the PDO is decomposed into three objectives: (i) improve the effectiveness of vocational training in key growth sectors; (ii) improve the effectiveness of short-term skills development in key growth sectors; and (iii) improve the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs in key growth sectors.

A split rating is undertaken given changes in the project's ambition introduced at the April 2019 restructuring in response to delayed implementation. While the PDO statement did not change, of the six original outcome indicators, the targets of two were reduced and one of these outcome indicators was dropped. At the approval of the 2019 restructuring, the project had disbursed 21.9 percent of the total amount disbursed by the project closing date ($14.46 million disbursed out of a total of $66.0 million).

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes

Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

Yes

d. Components

Original Components

Component 1: Extension of Training Supply and Quality Improvement in TVET in key growth sectors ***(estimated cost at appraisal: US$65 million; estimated cost at 2019 restructuring: US$34.65 million; estimated cost at 2021 restructuring: US$40.09 million; actual cost: US$39.51 million)***

- Supporting skills development and availability of training in key growth sectors through: (a) the construction of two technical and vocational education and training (TVET) centers for the construction and public works, and ICT sectors; (b) carrying out of dimensioning, feasibility and architectural studies for the establishment and management of the TVET centers; (c) carrying out of dual preparatory training for youth aspiring to work in the two sectors and on-the-job/continuing training to employees in said sectors; and (d) supporting the establishment of an independent management body for the TVET centers in partnership with the private sector.
- Improving the quality of existing TVET centers, through: (a) preparation of related procedures manuals, guidelines for preparation of proposals and the provision of training; and (b) provision of performance-based payments pursuant to performance-based contracts to selected TVET centers aimed at improving the quality of training and upgrading their facilities.

Component 2: Employability Development, Youth Integration and Entrepreneurship Promotion ***(estimated cost at appraisal: US$20 million; estimated cost at 2019 restructuring: US$17.93 million; estimated cost at 2021 restructuring: US$15.16 million; actual cost: US$15.49 million)***

- Carrying out an apprenticeship program aimed at increasing professional opportunities for youth with limited education, through apprenticeship and short-term training and insertion programs, including

provision of: (a) apprenticeship payments to apprenticeship beneficiaries to cover basic fees; (b) mentoring and coaching training; and (c) toolkits and equipment necessary for apprenticeship.
- Carrying out an internship program aimed at increasing job opportunities for young graduates, including: (a) the provision of internship payments for internship beneficiaries/graduates to improve the transition from higher education and TVET to the labor market; and (b) monitoring and evaluation of the internship program.
- Promoting youth employment through the development and implementation of entrepreneurial initiatives, including: (a) preparation of entrepreneurship-training modules; (b) organizing an information campaign to raise awareness and invite proposals for new business ideas; (c) selection of most promising business concepts; (d) support in the drafting of business plans and provision of required training in the areas of business planning and entrepreneurship; (e) provision of sub-grants to selected sub-grant beneficiaries as seed capital for specific development projects; and (f) technical assistance and mentoring for the carrying out of sub-projects.

Component 3: Institutional Capacity Support and Project Implementation ***(estimated cost at appraisal: US$10 million*; estimated cost at 2019 restructuring: US$7 million; estimated cost at 2021 restructuring: US$11.02 million; actual cost: US$10.98 million)***

- Support to the Borrower in the areas of project coordination, supervision, financial management, communication and outreach, impact evaluation and assessment, procurement, supervision of implementation of the safeguards instruments, including through the provision of training, operating costs, goods and services for the required purpose.
- Carrying out external evaluation of performance-based contracts.
- Carrying out a program of activities aimed at enhancing institutional capacity, including: (a) strengthening the institutional and operational capacity of the Ministry of Vocational Training and Youth Integration, ministry in charge of professional education, General Direction of Human Resources, and National Observatory on Employment and Training; (b) supporting the implementation of a new format of the Insertion and Reinsertion Fund (*Fonds d'Aide à l'Insertion et à la Réinsertion Professionnelle,* FIR) mechanism in the National Office for Employment; and (c) supporting the design and implementation of the regulatory and operational framework of an apprenticeship scheme.

* While the cost of Component 3 is presented as US$15 million in the PAD, the 2019 restructuring paper explains that US$5 million of this amount was viewed as "unallocated" and that the new proposed amount for "unallocated" under the restructuring was US$1 million. The 2019 restructuring paper explains that the unallocated amount was intended to be used to address any unforeseen situations and shortfalls due to currency fluctuations.

<u>Revised Components</u>

Component 1: Extension of Training Supply and Quality Improvement in TVET in key growth sectors ***(estimated cost at appraisal: US$65 million; estimated cost at 2019 restructuring: US$34.65 million; estimated cost at 2021 restructuring: US$40.09 million; actual cost: US$39.51 million)***

- **Sub-component 1.1:** The allocation to this sub-component was reduced from US$30 million to US$27.35 million at the 2019 restructuring, with the scope of work related to sporting and boarding facilities reduced due to high costs. The allocation to this sub-component was increased from

US$27.35 million to US$32.79 million at the 2021 restructuring to include the addition of a kitchen, restaurant for students and trainers, and infirmary.

- **Sub-component 1.2:** The allocation to this sub-component was reduced from US$35 million to US$7.3 million at the 2019 restructuring, with the number of TVET institutions being upgraded reduced from 14 to four. This was explained by significant delays in the development of strategic business plans for the institutions, as well as the involvement of other development partners working in this area. Some changes were introduced at the 2021 restructuring which, however, did not affect the amount allocated to this sub-component.

Component 2: Employability Development, Youth Integration and Entrepreneurship Promotion *(estimated cost at appraisal: US$20 million; estimated cost at 2019 restructuring: US$17.93 million; estimated cost at 2021 restructuring: US$15.16 million; actual cost: US$15.49 million)*

- **Sub-component 2.1:** The allocation to this sub-component was reduced from US$11 million to US$8.59 million at the 2019 restructuring, with the apprenticeship program for rural and agricultural jobs moved to the internship program and the target for the number of youth in urban apprenticeships increased to 2,400. The allocation to this sub-component was further reduced from US$8.59 million to US$8.09 million at the 2021 restructuring with project activities concluding earlier than anticipated so that government could focus on other project activities given the limited time remaining.
- **Sub-component 2.2:** The allocation to this sub-component increased from US$4 million to US$7.3 million at the 2019 restructuring. The target for youth participation increased from 3,500 to 3,800, but the target for the training-adaptation program for rural and agricultural jobs was reduced from 1,000 to 500. The allocation to this sub-component was reduced from US$7.03 million to US$5.13 million at the 2021 restructuring due to a decrease in the target for internships, with cost-savings being reallocated to Component 1 activities.
- **Sub-component 2.3:** The allocation to this sub-component was reduced from US$5 million to US$2.04 million in line with the reduction in the number of youth beneficiaries from 2,000 to 873. The allocation to this sub-component was reduced from US$2.04 million to US$1.94 million at the 2021 restructuring, with the number of youth beneficiaries reduced from 300 to 200. Cost-savings of US$0.1 million were reallocated to Component 1 activities.

Component 3: Institutional Capacity Support and Project Implementation *(estimated cost at appraisal: US$10 million*; estimated cost at 2019 restructuring: US$7 million; estimated cost at 2021 restructuring: US$11.02 million; actual cost: US$10.98 million)*

The allocation to this component was reduced from US$10 million to US$7 million at the 2019 restructuring in line with the reduction in the scope of the project activities and associated capacity support and implementation oversight needs. The allocation to this component was increased from US$7 million to US$11.02 million at the 2021 restructuring to cope with the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated the introduction of a mobile tool to monitor the internship program, the establishment of a digital platform for National Office for Employment (*Office National de l'Emploi*, ONE), and a study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Project Cost. The total project cost estimated at appraisal was $100 million (PAD, Table 1, p. 15). This included $65 million for Component 1, $20 million for Component 2, and $15 million for Component 3, and $0.25 million in Front-End Fees. The actual total cost at closing was $65.98 million, or 66 percent of the original estimate due to the change in scope of project activities under Components 1 and 2. Actual Component costs, provided in Section 2d (above), were, respectively: 62 percent of the original estimate for Component 1, 75 percent of the original estimate for Component 2, and 73 percent of the original estimate for Component 3.

Financing. The project was 100 percent financed through an International Bank for Reconstruction Development (IBRD) loan. The original loan amount approved by the Board was 94.6 million Euros ($100 million equivalent). As part of the April 19, 2019, restructuring, which reduced the project's scope, an amount of 34.88 million Euros ($39.42 million) was cancelled, leaving an adjusted amount of 59.72 million Euros ($60.58 million) in IBRD financing (Project Paper, April 19, 2019, Table 9). Total actual disbursements amounted to 59.71 million Euros ($65.98 million equivalent) – 63 percent of the original loan amount, and 100 percent of the amended loan amount. Large fluctuations in the US dollar over the implementation period explain the difference between the revised and actual disbursement amounts expressed in US dollar equivalents.

Dates. The project was approved on February 10, 2016, and became effective on December 13, 2016. A mid-term review was held on November 8, 2018. The original closing date of the project was December 31, 2021, and the actual closing date of the project was April 30, 2023. The project underwent three restructurings on April 19, 2019, October 13, 2021, and December 20, 2022. The first restructuring resulted in changes to the results framework, change in components and cost, the cancellation of financing, the reallocation of funds between disbursement categories, the change in institutional arrangements and the change in the implementation schedule. The second restructuring resulted in changes in the results framework, changes in components and cost, changes in the loan closing date, the reallocation between disbursement categories, and changes in the implementation schedule. The third restructuring resulted in changes in the loan closing date and the reallocation between disbursement categories. From its original closing date of December 31, 2021, the project was extended twice to allow time for completion of planned activities: initially by one year (to December 31, 2022) under the October 13, 2021, restructuring; and subsequently by an additional four months (to April 30, 2023) under the December 20, 2022, restructuring.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

At the time of appraisal, Gabon was confronted with a significant skills mismatch between those seeking jobs and the needs and demands of the labor market, resulting in the substitution of foreign workers for domestic workers, leading to a high unemployment rate. According to the ONE, while the majority of job offers sought applicants with technical skills, 64 percent of applicants surveyed lacked any relevant type of vocational training. This resulted in Gabon substituting foreign workers for domestic workers, notably, in the skills-intensive growth sectors, such as mining, oil, and information and communications technology. This contributed to the rise in the unemployment rate from 16.3 percent in 2005 to 20.4 percent in 2010, with the unemployment rate among the youth population between the ages of

15 and 24 years of age estimated at 35.5 percent, compared to 25 percent for the 25-34 age cohort and 17 percent for the 34-44 age cohort.

The significant skills mismatch in the labor market was explained at appraisal by the lack of quality basic education and problems with the TVET system. While there has been some modest progress on some of the issues identified at appraisal (and listed in this paragraph), most continue to undermine a better match between the supply of skills in Gabon and the needs and demands of the labor market. Notwithstanding Gabon's high enrollment rate for basic education and high literacy rate, the low quality of basic education—attributed to the continued overcrowding of primary schools and the poor working conditions of teachers— and the high secondary school dropout rate has undermined skills development. Meanwhile, numerous problems with the TVET system have also exacerbated the situation. First, there has been a lack of access to vocational institutions given that these were concentrated in urban areas and regional administrative centers, and that only 1,700 students out of 5,000 applicants were admitted into the program each year due to capacity constraints. Second, the quality of TVET programs has been low, resulting in an estimated 80 percent of graduates from these institutions failing to be hired in the sectors in which they were trained for. Third, private sector involvement in the development of TVET training programs and linkages to the industry has been weak, undermining the relevance of the programs. Fourth, TVET institutions lacked autonomy as they did not operate as distinct legal entities and did not have a board of directors (or similar entity) to facilitate private sector participation, and the Ministry of Vocational Training and Youth Integration (*Ministère chargé de la Formation Professionnelle et de le l'Insertion des Jeunes*, MFPIJ) retained the power to, for example, recruit and post staff in training institutions. Fifth, only 8 percent of total youth in post-primary education are enrolled in TVET institutions compared to 30-40 percent in other developing countries.

The PDO was aligned with the government's strategy at appraisal, which remained in effect beyond project closing. The PDO was aligned with all three pillars of the Government of Gabon's Strategic Plan for an Emerging Gabon *(Plan Stratégique Gabon Émergent,* PSGE) adopted in 2009 covering the 2012-2025 period, consisting of (i) Gabon Industrial (*Gabon Industriel*), which aims to position Gabon as an industrial center that uses clean energy and is driven by strategic raw materials including, but not limited to, manganese, iron, gas, and a regional wood processing industry; (ii) Green Gabon (*Gabon Vert*) which aims to position the country as a pioneer in the green economy through sustainable management of the country's rich biodiversity and the development of ecotourism; and (iii) Service-oriented Gabon (*Gabon des Services*) which aims to develop Gabon as a center of excellence in higher education and to develop the country's capacity in the research, business, tourism, health, media, and ICT sectors. The PSGE identified priority sectors holding the greatest potential for economic growth and job creation, which included construction, wood processing, mining, tourism, the green economy and ICT.

The PDO was aligned with the Bank's strategies for Gabon, both the one in effect at the time of appraisal and the subsequent one currently in effect. The PDO was aligned with one of the two strategic themes of the Country Partnership Strategy FY2012-FY2016 focused on increasing Gabon's competitiveness and employment, which included an outcome of enhanced vocational skills and capacity to support economic diversification and private sector development. The PDO is also aligned with the currently Country Partnership Framework FY2023-2027, specifically as it relates to the High Level Outcome of increasing employment in the non-oil private sector, which included an objective on improved environment for private investment in the non-oil sector.

Interventions under this project were complemented by existing and planned interventions by the Bank and other development partners. The upgrading of skills and enhanced employability were complementary to Gabon Investment Promotion and Competitiveness Project (P129267) which supported an improvement in the investment climate and fostered enterprise development, and the eGabon Project (P132824) intended to contribute to the development of a local ICT industry encompassing the creation of digital content, applications, and services. Other partners' support included the United Nations Development Program's National Project for Youth Employment supporting skills development and access to decent jobs for the youth population between the ages of 16 and 35 and an African Development Project supporting the training of teachers in higher education and vocational training.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Improve the effectiveness of vocational training in key growth sectors (original indicators and targets)

Rationale

As derived from the design document, and the M&E framework, this ICRR summarizes the following project logic. Through investments in civil works and equipment, activities to improve the quality and relevance of technical training in priority sectors, and formal partnerships between technical training institutions and the private sector, the project sought to boost enrollment of youth in high quality technical training programs in priority sectors, with the expected outcome that they would graduate from these programs and find employment soon thereafter.

However, the theory of change as presented in the ICR (Figure 1, p. 6), does not provide the full logic of the project, laying out and linking key project activities, to expected outputs, outputs to expected intermediate outcomes, and intermediate outcomes to expected outcomes. The PAD (p. 7) was clear in specifying that the PDO – improved effectiveness of training in relevant sectors – would be assessed by students' graduation from training programs (number of graduates, rates of graduation), and rates of employment (including self-employment) of graduates. The theory of change, as presented in the ICR (p. 6) does not capture these outcomes, nor does it capture key intermediate outcomes of improved quality and relevance of training.

The activities/inputs column for Component 1 (Extension of Training Supply and Quality Improvement in TVET in Key Growth Sectors) focuses mostly on civil works, with no mention of activities to improve training quality. The outputs column includes a mix of output, intermediate outcome and even outcome indicators, without showing their links and sequence. Among the outputs listed in the theory of change, there are some indicators of quality improvement: school managers and teachers trained; revised and implemented curricula; improved/expanded infrastructure. The outcomes column only provides the statements of the three PDO (e.g., for Objective 1: improve the effectiveness of vocational training programs in key growth sectors). The above-noted outcome measures of graduation and graduates' employment rates are not reflected at all as outcomes in the theory of change, even though they are captured (somewhat) among the indicators, especially with indicators added in 2019 (See Section 9 on M&E). The theory of change does not capture capacity building of TVET trainers and the ANFEP (National Agency for Training and Vocational Education), or the strengthening of inspections in the areas of competency-based pedagogy and management/governance, both of which are important elements of quality improvements.

Outputs and intermediate outcomes

Two new training centers specializing in two priority sectors (respectively, ICT and wood/construction/public works), were constructed and equipped with project support, and were expected to become operational by the end of 2023.

Four existing TVET institutions were upgraded under the project through rehabilitation works and the provision of needed equipment, ***falling short of the original scope of 14 TVET institutions***. The project also supported improvements in the quality and efficiency of training through the implementation of new pedagogical and management models, including greater involvement of the private sector, and the upgrading of trainers' skills and knowledge as detailed below.

The number of programs, which have revised and implemented the new curricula, rose from a baseline of zero, to 26 by the project's closing, ***surpassing the target*** of 25, and six months later (at the time of ICR preparation) rose to a total of 49, ***almost double the target*** of 25. In an email to IEG dated January 9, 2024, the Bank clarified that the revised curricula were developed by mobilizing international and national TVET experts, representatives of local companies, the board of directors of the National Agency for Training and Vocational Education, and inspectors from the National Pedagogical Institute to formulate and implement a survey on sectors with high potential for economic growth in Gabon. Survey results were reviewed by sectoral representatives and TVET institutions to identify the key skills needed by youth to meet the job requirements in these high-growth sectors. The design of the curricula and training programs focused on a practical, skills-based training approach and was informed by these results and consultative process. The task team later clarified in an email to IEG on January 9, 2024, that the revised and implemented curricula included the following:

- 20 curricula for training programs in the ICT and wood/construction/public works sectors (specifically designed for use in <u>the two new training centers</u> built for these sectors), of which:
    - 12 for ICT: (i) Telecom networks, (ii) cyber security, (iii) Micro-informatics and networks, (iv) network and telecom cable installer, (v) information systems and databases, (vi) Web and mobile programming, (vii) digital systems, (viii) computer installer, (ix) web marketing, (x) cybersecurity, (xi) multimedia and Internet, and (xii) multimedia infographic, and
    - eight for wood/construction/public works: (i) carpentry-coffering, (ii) renewable energies, (iii) elevator mechanics, (iv) metallurgical milling, (v) plumbing, (vi) civil construction, (vii) entrepreneurship, and (viii) English for wood/construction/public works sectors.
- 19 curricula for training programs in <u>the four rehabilitated training institutes</u>: (i) kitchen, (ii) restaurant, (iii) reception, (iv) bakery, (v) shaving, (vi) slaying-tracing hardware, (vii) industrial slicing, (viii) woodworking, (ix) plumbing installation, (x) building electricity, (xi) industrial electricity, (xii) maintenance of hospital equipment, (xiii) physical sciences and laboratory chemistry (3 versions), (xiv) quality control in agri-food; (xv) industrial sawing-peeling, (xvi) carpentry-cabinet making, and (xvii) carpentry-general carpentry.

- 10 curricula for general training programs in the following professions: (i) auto electricity, (ii) auto mechanics, (iii) boiler welding, (iv) ironing, (v) plumbing, (vi) electrical construction, (vii) hairdressing, (viii) cutting and sewing, (ix) kitchen, and (x) infographics.

A total of 594 youth were enrolled in the four existing TVET institutions that were supported under the project, ***falling short of the original target*** of 4,800 (12 percent achievement), of which 29 percent were female, ***substantially achieving the target*** of 30 percent. Total enrollments had increased to 1,203 (of which 39 percent female) by October 2023, ***falling short of the original target*** of 4,800, but ***exceeding the*** 30 percent ***target share for females***. In its email to IEG of May 28, 2024, the Bank indicated that total enrollments in restructured vocational institutions further increased to 1,995 as of May 24, 2024 ***(42 percent achievement)***, with the ***sub-indicator targeting female youth surpassing the target***.

Against the original target of 4,500, there were no youth enrolled in the new TVET institutions supported by the project in the two priority sectors—ICT and wood/construction/public works—by the project's end, since the two centers had still not opened. In its May 28, 2024 email to IEG, the Bank indicated that, as of May 24, 2024, 519 youth were enrolled in the new TVET institutions supported by the project in the two priority sectors ***(12 percent achievement)***.

While the Bank indicated that the project supported improvements focused on strengthening the capacity of TVET trainers and ANFEP, and inspections in the areas of competency-based pedagogy and management/governance, evidence to this effect remains scant. The only evidence provided was the participation of 46 TVET trainers in a seven-month training program in Morocco and the participation of the two directors chosen to run the two new sectoral centers in a two-month training program in Morocco.

The number of direct project beneficiaries—defined as individuals or groups who directly derive benefits from an intervention (in this case students enrolled in or having completed programs in targeted training institutions, or in apprenticeship, internship, and entrepreneurship programs)—rose from a baseline of zero to 7,665 by the project's closing, and continued to rise post-project to 8,462 by the time of ICR preparation (October 2023) ***falling short of the original target*** of 18,100 beneficiaries ***(47 percent achievement)***. In its May 28, 2024 email to IEG, the Bank reported that the number of direct project beneficiaries had further risen to 10,976 by May 24, 2024 ***(61 percent achievement)***. The share of female beneficiaries as of October 2023 was 47 percent, ***surpassing the target*** of 30 percent. The ICR (p. 13 and p. 26) reports that the shortfall in direct project beneficiaries is attributable to delays in the construction of the two new training centers. While labeled as an outcome indicator in the design documents and in the ICR, IEG assesses this as an intermediate outcome indicator because it is a measure of coverage/uptake of training, and not a measure of training effectiveness.

Outcomes.

An original outcome indicator was the graduation rate of youth from TVET institutions supported by the project (defined in the PAD, Annex 1, as the share of final year students, who actually graduate), with a set target of 60 percent. This indicator was deleted during the April 2019 restructuring due to the project's delayed schedule for the construction and opening of the training centers (Project Paper, para. 12). This original target was ***not achieved.***

From a baseline of zero, no TVET institutions receiving project support had functioning boards of directors (defined as a board with 50 percent of representatives drawn from the private sector and which meets at least twice a year), by the project's end, ***not achieving the original target*** of eight TVET institutions. This outcome indicator is a measure of improved governance and effectiveness of TVET institutions. In its May 28, 2024 email to IEG, the Bank reported that two TVET Institutions had functioning boards of directors as of May 24, 2024 ***(25 percent achievement)***.

The number of public-private joint management agreements signed between the private sector and the public sector for the joint management of TVET institutions based on performance contracts rose from a baseline of zero to three, ***falling short of the original target*** of 12 ***(25 percent achievement)***. The Bank also reported, in its May 28 2024 email to IEG, that the number of public-private joint management agreements signed rose to 26 as of May 24, 2024 ***(217 percent achievement)***. Signed in June 2020, these agreements focused on improvements to the quality and relevance of TVET training to be achieved through joint work of training institutions and the private sector, which was expected to culminate in improved effectiveness of training programs. The three signed agreements included:

(1) a general agreement signed by the TVET Ministry with private companies to improve the overall employability and insertion of young people trained in TVET institutions;

(2) a Wood/Construction/Public Works sectoral agreement, which aimed to (a) establish good governance of these specific sectors in the TVET system; (b) ensure the active participation of sectoral professionals in all stages of the training process; (c) ensure a quality and relevant training program; and (d) facilitate the successful integration of trained young people into the workforce; and

(3) an ICT sectoral agreement, which aimed to: (a) establish sound governance of the ICT sector in the TVET system; (b) ensure strong involvement of sectoral professionals at all stages of the training process; (c) provide quality vocational training and learning; and (d) facilitate the insertion of trained young people into employment.

In the absence of data on completion of TVET training and on the employment within one year of those completing training programs, there is insufficient evidence to assess the achievement of Objective 1 (effectiveness of vocational training in key sectors).

Rating
Modest

OBJECTIVE 1 REVISION 1

Revised Objective
Improve the effectiveness of vocational training in key growth sectors (revised indicators and targets)

Revised Rationale
The rationale remained identical to the original rationale as elaborated above.

Outputs and intermediate outcomes.

The 8,462 direct project beneficiaries achieved at the time of the ICR preparation (October 2023) fell ***short of the revised target*** of 12,573 beneficiaries ***(67 percent achieved)***. Female beneficiaries comprised 47 percent of total beneficiaries, surpassing the target of 30 percent. In its May 28, 2024 email to IEG, the Bank reported that the number of direct project beneficiaries further rose to 10,976 ***(87 percent achievement)***, of which, 5,203 female beneficiaries, still surpassing the target of 30 percent.

The government adopted a regulatory framework for the management of TVET institutions, as envisaged. This comprised: (i) texts adopted in connection with the reform of Law No. 21/2011 (Law of General Orientation for Education, Vocational Training, and Research) – i.e., overall Decree on the organization and operation of TVET centers plus two specific Decrees establishing the new sectoral centers focused on Wood/Construction/Public Works and ICT; (ii) decrees reforming the National Agency for Training and Vocational Education and the National Pole for the Promotion of Employment; (iii) the three public-private partnership agreements signed in June 2020 (one framework agreement and two sectoral agreements for Wood/Construction/Public Works and ICT); and (iv) the decision of the TVET Minister to establish councils with private sector representation in TVET centers. While this indicator was introduced during the 2019 restructuring, it was a good measure of the original intent of Objective 1 (quality, relevance and effectiveness of TVET training) and therefore is appropriate to assess against the original objective. ***(Substantial achievement)***

The number of programs which now have revised and implemented curricula rose from a baseline of zero to 26 by the project's closing, further increasing to 49 by the time of ICR preparation (October 2023), ***surpassing the target*** of 25.

By the project's closing, 594 youth had enrolled in restructured vocational institutions, of which 29 percent were female. Total enrollments had increased to 1,203 (of which 34 percent were female) by October 2023, ***falling short of the revised target*** of 2,800 enrollments ***(43 percent achieved),*** but ***surpassing the 30 percent target of females' share of those enrollments***. In its May 28, 2024 email to IEG, the Bank reported that the number of youth enrolled in restructured vocational institutions increased to 1,995 as of May 2024 ***(71 percent achievement)***, with the sub-indicator targeting female youth surpassing the target of 30 percent.

No youth were enrolled in the two new TVET institutions supported by the project in the two priority sectors by the project's end, given that these institutions had not yet opened, ***not achieving the reduced target of 2,500***. The Bank, in its May 28, 2024 email to IEG, reported that, as of May 24, 2024, 519 youth were enrolled in the new TVET institutions supported by the project in the two priority sectors ***(24 percent achievement),*** with the sub-indicator targeting female youth surpassing the target of 30 percent.

Outcomes.

Under the 2019 restructuring, the graduation rate of TVET students was dropped as an indicator, and the targets of the remaining two indicators were reduced.

No TVET institutions receiving project support had functioning boards of directors by the project's end, ***not achieving the reduced*** target of six, established during the 2019 restructuring due to a decrease in the number of targeted TVET centers under the project. The number of TVET institutions with functioning boards of directors rose to two as of May 24, 2024 ***(33 percent achievement)***.

The number of public-private joint management agreements signed between the private sector and the public sector for the joint management of TVET institutions based on performance contracts rose from a baseline of zero to three by the project's closing, ***substantially achieving the revised target*** of four ***(75 percent achieved)***. The Bank later indicated that the number of public-private joint management agreements signed rose to 26 ***(650 percent achievement)***.

In the absence of data on completion of TVET training and on the employment within one year of those completing training programs, there is insufficient evidence to assess the achievement of Objective 1 (effectiveness of vocational training in key sectors).

Revised Rating
Modest

OBJECTIVE 2
Objective
Improve the effectiveness of short-term skills development in key growth sectors (original indicators and targets)

Rationale
Improved effectiveness of short-term skills development included two key outputs: the development of apprenticeship programs to help rural and peri-urban workers develop professional skills; and the development of internship programs targeted at youth to support graduates from higher education and TVET institutions to address their practical skills deficit and find jobs. These outputs were expected to lead to intermediate outcomes, including the enrollment of youth in these programs, and eventually to the outcomes of successful completion of these programs and employment of graduates thereafter.

Outputs and intermediate outcomes.

The project supported the development of an alternate training for out-of-school youth in the form of a ***dual apprenticeship program*** (comprised of coursework and apprenticeship, focused on priority sectors). The dual program targeted unskilled youth who had completed primary and/or secondary education as well as out-of-school youth and unemployed individuals between the ages of 16 and 24. The training combined coursework in a training center and apprenticeship in a craft unit. The duration of the training ranged from 12 months (e.g., service and catering occupations) to 24 months (e.g., automotive and construction fields). The time was divided between the training center (25%) and the craft units (75%). The project provided employment payments to apprenticeship participants consisting of stipends, and accident and medical insurance coverage.

By the end of the project a total of 2,218 youth had enrolled in a dual apprenticeship program in urban areas, ***falling slightly short of the original target*** of 3,000 ***(74 percent achievement)***. The share of female enrolment stood at 39.27 percent, ***surpassing the target*** of 35 percent.

The project also supported the introduction of the ***Internship and Youth Adaptation Training Program***. The internship program helped young individuals between the ages of 16 and 34 who had already graduated from institutions of higher education or TVET schools by placing them in professional internships. This enabled them to acquire initial work experience and further develop practical skills that would facilitate their insertion into working life. The program lasted for six months and could be renewed once. The project financed: (i) employment payments to internship participants comprising stipends, accident, and medical coverage; (ii) monitoring of youth during the internship period; and (iii) survey of youth following the completion of their internships.

A total of 4,172 youth had enrolled in the internship program, ***surpassing the original target*** of 3,500. According to the results of a December 2021 tracer study carried out by a Canadian consulting firm (ICR, p. 14), 82 percent of these youth were unemployed prior to being admitted into the internship program.

By the project's end, a total of 49,224 youth had registered in the job seekers database established by ONE, ***surpassing the original target*** of 12,000 by a factor of four.

Outcomes.

Completion rates of the internship and apprenticeship programs were substantially achieved, with the share of females surpassing targets. While there is no direct measure of the quality and relevance of these trainings, these are likely to be substantial, since they were developed and implemented jointly with the private sector in order to respond to their needs and demands for specific skills in specific sectors.

- 84.6 percent of enrolled youth completed the internship program, ***substantially achieving the target*** of 90 percent. Of those who completed the internship program, 59 percent were female, ***surpassing the target*** of 30 percent.
- 70.6 percent of enrolled youth completed the apprenticeship program, ***fully achieving the target*** of 70 percent. Of those who completed the apprenticeship program, 46.1 percent were female, ***surpassing the target*** of 30 percent.

However, the employment rates of those completing these programs fell far short of targets. By project closing, 26 percent of youth, who had completed apprenticeship or internship training supported by the project, were employed or self-employed one year after the end of the program, rising slightly to 27 percent by the time of ICR preparation, six months later, ***falling short of the target*** of 50 percent ***(54 percent achievement)***. Of these employed/self-employed youth, 58 percent were female, ***surpassing the target*** of 30 percent. (Although introduced as part of the 2019 restructuring, this indicator presents a measure of the original intended outcome of the project – the effectiveness of short-term skills development training [apprenticeships and internships], particularly its use for securing employment, including self-employment).

Post-completion placements of young women were modestly achieved, overall.

- A total of 871 young women were trained under the dual apprenticeship program, of which only 57 young women (or 6.5 percent) secured placements after completing their apprenticeships.
- Likewise, a total of 2,297 young women were trained under the internship program, of which only 578 placements (or 25 percent) were achieved, including fixed-term and permanent contracts.
- On the other hand, the *agripreneurs* program trained 24 young women in agricultural skills and supported them in establishing cooperatives.

According to the results of a December 2021 tracer study carried out by a Canadian consulting firm (ICR, p. 14, as well as evidence presented by the Bank): (i) 93 percent of beneficiaries found the experience useful in improving their professional skills; (ii) 73 percent ultimately pursued careers in the same branch of activity as their internship; (iii) 83.3 percent of youth enrolled who had been employed prior to being admitted in the internship program benefitted from an increase in their income following the completion of the internship; and (iv) 74 percent of beneficiaries who were employed at the time of the survey felt that their economic and social situation had improved as a result of the project. (As noted above, youth enrolled in the program who had been employed prior to being admitted to the internship program represent a small portion (18 percent) of all youth enrolled in the internship program.)

Rating
Modest

OBJECTIVE 2 REVISION 1

Revised Objective
Improve the effectiveness of short-term skills development in key growth sectors (revised indicators and targets)

Revised Rationale
The rationale remained identical to the original rationale as elaborated above.

Outputs and intermediate outcomes

A total of 2,218 youth had enrolled in a dual apprenticeship program in urban areas, ***substantially achieving the revised target*** of 2,400 ***(92 percent achievement)***. The share of female enrolment stood at 39.27 percent, ***surpassing the target*** of 35 percent.

A total of 4,172 youth had enrolled in the internship program, ***substantially achieving the revised target*** of 4,300 ***(97 percent achievement).***

By the project's end, a total of 49,224 youth had registered in the job seekers database established by ONE, ***surpassing the revised target*** of 20,000 by a factor of 2.5.

Outcomes

The reported outcomes are identical to the ones reported under the original targets.

Revised Rating
Modest

OBJECTIVE 3

Objective
Improve the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs in key growth sectors (original indicators and targets)

Rationale

Project activities supported a critical output: the development of a new training program in entrepreneurship. Expected intermediate outcomes included: enhanced entrepreneurial skills of youth completing the program, enhanced capacity to develop their own business plans, and, with program support, the identification of necessary financing to start their own businesses. The expected outcome of the program was self-employment of youth completing the program, achieved with program assistance and follow-up during the start-up phase of their self-employment.

Outputs and intermediate outcomes

A total of 681 youth trained under the entrepreneurship program elaborated an income-generating project ***falling short of the original target*** of 2,000 ***(34 percent achievement)***. Of these youth who elaborated an income generating project, 46 percent (or 313) were female, ***surpassing the target*** of 35 percent.

Outcomes

According to p. 18 of the ICR and based on clarifications received by the Bank's team in an email dated March 3, 2024, of the 358 young women who received entrepreneurship training, 126 (or 35 percent) succeeded in executing their projects, as of October 2023.

By the project's closing 148 youth had started the implementation of income-generating activities, and this rose to 260 by October 2023, ***substantially achieving the target of 300 (87 percent achievement)***. (Although introduced as part of the 2019 restructuring, this indicator presents a measure of the original intended outcome of the project – the effectiveness of entrepreneurship training – its use for securing employment, including self-employment.)

Rating
Substantial

OBJECTIVE 3 REVISION 1

Revised Objective
Improve the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs in key growth sectors (revised indicators and targets)

Revised Rationale
The rationale remained identical to the original rationale as elaborated above.

Outputs and intermediate outcomes

A total of 681 youth trained under the entrepreneurship program elaborated an income-generating project ***substantially achieving the revised target*** of 873 ***(78 percent achievement).*** Of these, 46 percent were female, ***surpassing the target*** of 35 percent.

Outcomes

The reported outcomes are identical to the ones reported under the original targets.

Revised Rating
Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

Overall efficacy *under the original indicators and targets* is rated Modest, with efficacy under Objective 1 (Improve effectiveness of vocational training in key growth sectors) rated Modest, efficacy under Objective 2 (Improve effectiveness of short-term skills development in key growth sectors) rated Modest and efficacy under Objective 3 (Improve effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs in key growth sectors) rated Substantial.

Overall efficacy *under the revised indicators and targets* is rated Modest, with efficacy under Objective 1 (Improve effectiveness of vocational training in key growth sectors) rated Modest, efficacy under Objective 2 (Improve effectiveness of short-term skills development in key growth sectors) rated Modest and efficacy under Objective 3 (Improve effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs in key growth sectors) rated Substantial.

Overall Efficacy Rating	Primary Reason
Modest	Low achievement

5. Efficiency

Economic Efficiency. An economic analysis was carried out at appraisal and at project completion. The results of the economic analysis carried out on an *ex-ante* basis at project preparation point to a net present value (NPV) of US$21.54 million and an internal rate of return (IRR) of 16.7 percent. The results of the sensitivity analysis performed suggest that 95 cents would be reaped in benefits for every dollar invested in the project. The benefit-to-cost ratio was estimated at 1.12. The results of the economic analysis carried out on an *ex-post* basis at project completion point to a net present value of US$61.69 million and to an internal rate of return of 21.4 percent. The benefit-to-cost ratio was estimated at 1.94. IEG finds that the economic analysis performed at the appraisal and at the project completion stages lack the assumption details. For example, the annual social discount rate is not presented, nor are assumptions underlying benefits and costs (including capital, and operating and maintenance expenditures) and their respective projected timeframes. IEG also requested clarifications from the Bank regarding the significant difference in the NPV of the economic analysis performed at the appraisal and ICR stages to which the Bank responded in an email dated January 28, 2024: “Reasons for this difference may include changes in economic conditions, project scope, unforeseen challenges, or deviations from initial assumptions. For example, in the ex-ante phase, the project preparation team used household survey data from 2010; in the ex-post phase, we used household survey data from 2017, and a key element of the difference may be the change in the country's economic conditions and earnings by education level of beneficiaries between 2010 and 2017. The team also used an average annual exchange rate of CFAF 490 per US dollar (based on 2010 exchange rates) to convert local currency into US dollars at the preparation stage, and an average annual exchange rate of CFAF 624 per US dollar at the ICR stage."

Implementation Efficiency. The ICR indicates that project achievements were undermined by unforeseen challenges and delays, including a nine-month delay between the Board approval and project effectiveness, as well as delays in establishing the project coordination unit (PCU), thereby limiting the amount of time available for the implementation of project activities. This was partly explained by the lack of understanding of Bank procedures as this constituted the first Bank-funded education and skills project in Gabon since 1974. Other challenges leading to implementation delays included changes in implementing agency leadership, design changes, high staff turnover, a reduction in financing amount and scale of project activities, and interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the construction of the two new training centers was behind schedule, but these centers were ultimately completed and equipped by project closing.

Efficiency Rating

Modest

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal	✓	16.70	89.00 ☐ Not Applicable
ICR Estimate	✓	21.40	89.00 ☐ Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The relevance of the objectives is rated High, given that the PDO is aligned with the government's and the World Bank's current priorities for the country. Overall efficacy is rated Modest against the original objectives and targets and against the restructured objectives and targets, albeit with a change in the efficacy rating of Objective 1. The efficiency of the project is rated Modest. The project outcome is thus rated Moderately Unsatisfactory (Table 1).

Table 1: Overall Outcome Ratings Prior to and Following the 2019 Restructuring

Rating Dimension	Original Objectives & Targets	Revised Objectives and Targets as restructured in 2019
Relevance of objectives	High	
Efficacy	Modest	

Objective 1: Improve effectiveness of vocational training in key growth sectors	Modest	Modest
Objective 2: Improve effectiveness of short-term skills development	Modest	Modest
Objective 3: Improve effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs	Substantial	Substantial
Efficiency	Modest	
Outcome ratings	Moderately Unsatisfactory	
Final outcome rating	Moderately Unsatisfactory	

a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Unsatisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The ICR (p. 23) states that a substantial portion of project activities have been successfully integrated into the official mandate and service offerings of the TVET ministry, ensuring their sustainability. A risk assessment was conducted at the project preparation stage to identify the key sources of risks to sustaining development outcomes, including capacity risks. Further, it states that these risks were mostly mitigated through institutional strengthening measures including, the establishment of vocational training institutions, the enhancement of overall governance, and the increased use of private sector partnerships. The project also supported the monitoring of labor market changes by facilitating the development of the PNPE’s (*Pôle national pour la promotion de l'emploi*, National Pole for the Promotion of Employment) capacity to identify and monitor employment market changes, benefiting job-seeking youth. The project also contributed to improvements in data systems and the utilization of data for employment policy development. The ICR further states that these achievements are likely to increase the chances of perpetuating and maintaining project interventions moving forward.

The ICR Review identifies two factors, which could undermine the sustainability of development outcomes. First, none of the TVET institutions had a functioning board of directors by the project's end, a fact which risks undermining private sector participation in the design of curricula and training programs, reducing their relevance to meeting the job requirements of the labor market. Second, TVET institutions require steady and sufficient funding to delivery programs. The lack of fiscal space or changes in government administration may lead to a change in priorities and reduce the funding allocated to TVET institutions, undermining the quality of the programs and their ability to deliver training services.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

Project activities were highly relevant to the country and sectoral context as detailed under Section 3 of the ICRR. The choice of financing instrument was adequate given the limited institutional capacity of the implementing agency and government more broadly, with the Investment Project Financing facilitating the provision of technical assistance in support of institutional strengthening. Project design relied on the roadmap for enhancing training programs, skills development activities, and youth employability in Gabon, as laid out in the PSGE 2012-2025. Assessed risks included: (i) poor institutional and managerial capacity; (ii) weak human resources and lack of familiarity with Bank projects; (iii) weak fiduciary accountability; (iv) insufficient capacity for monitoring and evaluation, project administration, sector coordination, and technical oversight; and (v) limited capacity of critical stakeholders. Risk mitigation included: (i) capacity building initiatives supported under Component 3; (ii) establishment of a comprehensive management information system for monitoring and evaluation purposes; (iii) strengthening the internal capacity of implementing agencies and establishment of appropriate protocols and controls to address fiduciary challenges; (iv) purchase and installation of a computerized accounting system for the implementing agency; (v) establishment of a procedures manual for effective implementation of administrative and fiduciary protocols; and (vi) establishment of a Stakeholder Committee to facilitate consultation with the private sector and address implementation challenges. The Project Implementation Manual provided guidelines on M&E methodology, including on the development of baseline data and indicator calculation to support consistent and accurate data collection. Environmental aspects were adequately prepared.

The technical design incorporated recommendations from peer reviewers and recognized research for addressing the skills mismatch and lack of employability among Gabonese youth. Moreover, the preparation process involved a highly collaborative and consultative approach with the government of Gabon.

There were, however, significant shortcomings in readiness for implementation. Gabon's experience and capacity for managing and implementing a project of this nature fell short of needs and the above-listed mitigation measures did not adequately address capacity gaps. Implementation arrangements for Component 2.3 activities were inadequate and ultimately led to changes at the first restructuring to include a combination of ONE tasked with the management of youth at the end of their apprenticeship, the National Agency for Professional Training and Development tasked with overseeing the integration of new modules into the training programs run by the training centers, and private structures being charged with execution. The Bank could have mitigated fiduciary risks by making adequate provisions for technical assistance and capacity building on the procurement of goods and services at the start of the project. P. 24 of the ICR also reports that the project did not have a dedicated communications specialist or a communications plan, leading to unnecessary confusion among stakeholders. Moreover, there was no education specialist based in the country to provide real-time advice and support.

There were also shortcomings in the project's theory of change and in its results framework. As detailed in Sections 4 (Efficacy) and 9 (Monitoring and Evaluation), the theory of change (ICR, p. 6) did not provide sufficient articulation of the project's intended outcomes, as specified in the PAD: graduation/completion of training programs and employment or self-employment of those completing these programs. While the original results framework included indicators to track graduation from TVET institutions and completion of apprenticeship and internship training programs, it did not include any measure to track employment or self-employment of those graduating/completing training programs.

Quality-at-Entry Rating

Moderately Unsatisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

The Bank conducted two supervision missions to Gabon per year to ensure effective management and oversight and recorded implementation progress through Implementation Status and Results Reports (ISRs). During the course of early implementation, the Bank encountered formidable challenges and delays, including a nine-month delay between the Board approval and project effectiveness and delays in establishing the PCU. These missions, and especially the 2018 MTR, addressed capacity constraints and culminated in the 2019 restructuring, which reduced the project scope and provided more support and technical assistance for implementation capacity building. Soon after the 2019 restructuring, the recruitment of a technical consultant, stationed in Libreville, helped support implementation, enhancing regular interaction with, and real-time support for, the different implementing agencies. The 2019 restructuring also added indicators to measure outcomes specified in the PAD, but not included in the original results framework, specifically, share of youth having completed an apprenticeship or internship supported by the project, who were employed or self-employed one year after the program's end.

The Bank's restructurings aimed to provide quick course corrections for emerging issues. Supervision missions provided regular reports on safeguards, procurement and FM performance, which were used to enhance the capacity of the PCU and other implementing entities. These were especially important for addressing procurement issues, which caused important delays in the construction and equipment of the two new TVET centers. While the ICR does not explicitly state whether or not the Borrower was fully compliant with safeguard and fiduciary policies, it does report the following: (1) Environmental and social safeguards were consistently monitored and rated as Moderately Satisfactory during most of the implementation period, with the Bank providing feedback and recommendations, which culminated in a Satisfactory E&S rating by the project's end. (2) FM was rated Moderately Satisfactory early on in the project and Satisfactory during the last two years of implementation. (3) Procurement was rated Moderately Satisfactory for most of implementation and at Project closing. Notwithstanding significant delays, procurement management was effective, all planned activities were accomplished, all required payments to contractors were made, and all documents were uploaded into the procurement (STEP) system.

Aide-memoires and ISRs were used to keep World Bank management well informed about the project's progress. Moreover, the Bank team's consistent documentation and sharing of supervision mission updates kept project stakeholders abreast of project progress and milestones achieved. The ICR (p. 23) reports that this comprehensive reporting played a vital role in facilitating the analysis and evaluation of the project's outcomes and impacts.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating
Moderately Unsatisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The theory of change, as presented in the ICR (Figure 1, p. 6) had some gaps in terms of the identification and sequencing of key outputs, intermediate outcomes and outcomes (see also ICRR Section 4). The results framework indicators filled some of these gaps, linking project activities and outputs to outcomes, with those chosen indicators, for the most part, sufficiently specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. The ICR reports that the Project Implementation Manual provided detailed guidelines on the M&E methodology, including on the development of baseline figures and indicator calculation to support consistent and accurate data collection. Finally, the project financed tracer surveys and satisfaction surveys to gather feedback from the implementation of project activities from project beneficiaries.

b. M&E Implementation

The PCU was charged with all M&E-related activities and there was a dedicated team member who was responsible for overseeing all aspects of project implementation. An international firm specializing in M&E was recruited to assist the PCU in designing the M&E system and conducting annual evaluations.
A baseline data collection for indicators was conducted in collaboration with implementing agencies. The Bank provided technical assistance on M&E principles and practices to relevant stakeholders, including ministries and implementing agencies, with the latter being responsible for data collection and reporting on their activities. The PCU consolidated and reviewed data related to output indicators and the financial and physical progress of the project. In the end, the project generated enough data to track progress and allow the assessment of efficacy.

c. M&E Utilization

The ICR notes that progress reports on the project implementation status were produced twice a year, along with data to assess performance indicators. Annual reviews were organized by the PCU to evaluate progress, assess lessons learned and incorporate adjustments to project activities.

M&E Quality Rating
Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project is classified as Category B on environmental safeguards. Three safeguard policies were triggered, namely, OP/BP 4.01 (Environmental Assessment), OP/BP 4.11 (Physical Cultural Resources), and OP/BP 4.12 (Involuntary Resettlement), with the latter being triggered as a precautionary measure despite the fact that the project did not result in the resettlement of people. An Environmental and Social (E&S) Management Framework was prepared in 2015, approved and disclosed during project preparation and several specific safeguard tools and instruments were also prepared and utilized during project implementation. The E&S screening of activities was systematized, and E&S monitoring reports were regularly produced.

E&S safeguards performance was consistently monitored during implementation and ISRs consistently rated this aspect "above the line," with ratings of Moderately Satisfactory and Satisfactory. The ICR (para. 59) notes the end-of-project rating of Satisfactory. The number of operational health and safety specialists was increased for each contractor and supervising engineering firm. Funding was allocated at each of the project restructurings to address shortcomings in the design of the new training centers to achieve the recommended E&S standards related to emergency exits and security aspects and the improvement of dining rooms and study laboratories. The placement of geotextiles, remediation work, and revegetation of embankments at the new sites treated gullies thereby reducing the risk of landslides. The PCU implemented the management of the Environmental, Social, Health and Safety guarantees of performance. The ICR did not provide an explicit statement of satisfactory compliance.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial management risks were considered to be high at appraisal. To mitigate the fiduciary risks, the Bank conducted supervision missions twice a year, developed a Procedures Manual and established an experienced financial management team comprised of a financial and administrative officer and an accountant. IFRs and audit reports were submitted on time and were considered of adequate quality during project implementation. The ICR does not provide an explicit statement of satisfactory compliance with the Bank's FM policies, although it does state **(para. 60) that Financial Management was rated Moderately Satisfactory during the early years of implementation and Satisfactory for the last two years** (ICR, para. 60). IEG's review of the 13 ISRs submitted for this project reveals that all FM ratings were "above the line" (either Satisfactory or Moderately Satisfactory), except for one Moderately Unsatisfactory rating issued in ISR #4, December 27, 2017. Because FM was upgraded to Satisfactory in ISR#5, and was rated Satisfactory in the final ISR#13 (with a mix of Moderately Satisfactory and Satisfactory ratings in between), it is reasonable to assume that the FM issues encountered in late 2017 were addressed and resolved expeditiously and that the project was compliant with FM policies. The ICR does not mention, or address the reason behind, the MU rating in late 2017 or provide adequate evidence of redress by the Bank to ensure compliance after that poor performance.

Procurement was rated Moderately Satisfactory at project closing and for most of implementation, except for the first three ISRs, which gave fully Satisfactory ratings. There were significant challenges with the procurement of goods and services during project implementation, leading to substantial delays. The Bank provided support with procurement processes, resulting in all planned activities being accomplished without any mis-procurement issues, all contracts being fulfilled, and all required payments being made to contractors. All procurement documents were uploaded to the Systematic Tracking of

Exchanges in Procurement system. The ICR did not provide an explicit statement of satisfactory compliance.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

None noted.

d. Other

None noted.

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Overall Modest achievements on efficacy, against original objectives/targets and against restructured targets and Modest efficiency.
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	There were significant shortcomings in readiness for implementation. There were also shortcomings in the results framework and theory of change, which undermined the measurement of outcomes.
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

IEG highlights the following key lessons identified in the ICR:

1. Effective communications campaigns can keep stakeholders informed and engaged in project implementation. This was particularly important in this project given that it constituted the first Bank-financed education and skilling project in Gabon since 1974. Further, this was important given the numerous challenges with project implementation, which included, changes in implementing agency leadership, design changes, high staff turnover, a reduction in financing amount and scale of project activities, and interruptions due to the COVID-19

pandemic. The ICR reports that the project did not have a dedicated communications specialist or a communications plan, leading to unnecessary confusion among stakeholders;

2. A multi-phased programmatic approach rather than a single project might be appropriate in low-capacity country contexts where the Bank is engaging in a sector for the first time to allow time for policy dialogue and reforms. The ICR admits that much remains to be done in order to solidify the initial gains made in this project; and
3. Dedicated World Bank staff on the ground are necessary in low-capacity country contexts where the Bank is engaging for the first time. This proximity allows for real-time communication, relationship building, and a better understanding of technical and operational challenges to better address them. The ICR indicates that there was an observable improvement in communication once dedicated staff were placed full-time in the country.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The quality of the ICR is rated Substantial, but barely so. The ICR provided sufficient evidence of project performance and achievement and was systematic in presenting and explaining end-of-project data, as well as updates in this data at the time of ICR preparation. The quality of analysis was generally sound, presenting and linking evidence to various segments of the results chain. The lessons identified through the project were based on evidence and analysis generated in the ICR, and they were appropriately linked to the ICR's narrative. Guidelines were followed in the ICR's overall presentation. However, the ICR's presentation of the theory of change (Figure 1, p. 6) was not fully reflective of the project's logic, as laid out in the design document (as explained in Section 4 of this ICRR). The ICR did not explicitly state whether the Borrower was fully compliant with safeguards and fiduciary policies, though it did provide evidence to indicate compliance.

a. **Quality of ICR Rating**
Substantial