

Approach Paper

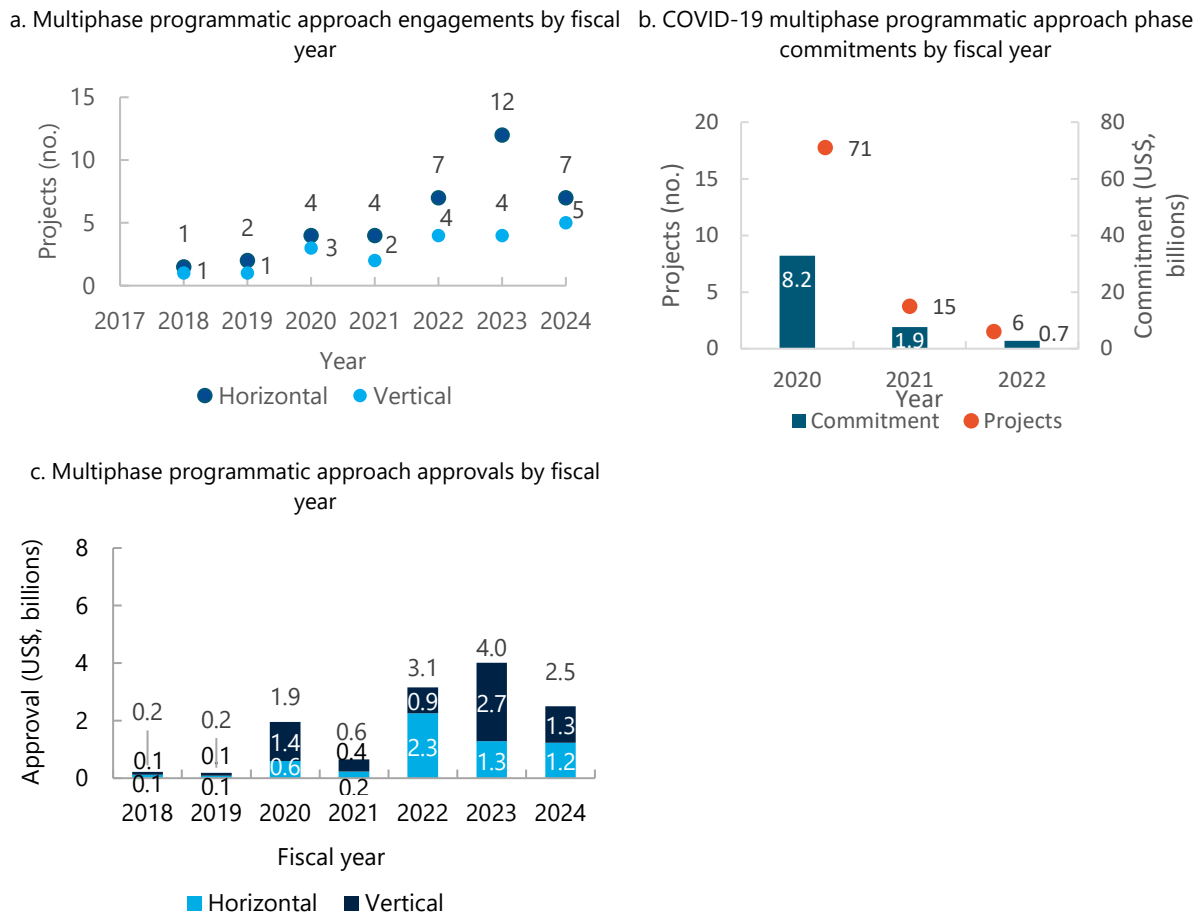
Early-Stage Evaluation of the Multiphase Programmatic Approach

June 10, 2024

1. Background and Evaluation Rationale

1.1 The multiphase programmatic approach (MPA) is a way of structuring a long, large, or complex engagement—typically over 8–10 years—either as a set of smaller linked operations or phases using investment project financing (IPF) or Program-for-Results under one program or as a multicountry program, sometimes designed to deliver a global or regional public good. Since its introduction in fiscal year 2018, there has been a steady increase in its use (figure 1.1). A total of US\$18 billion was approved under the World Bank’s COVID-19 response, of which US\$10.8 billion has been committed and US\$8.5 billion disbursed. A further US\$28.8 billion has been approved under other MPA programs, of which US\$12.6 billion has been committed. The MPA is also expected to support the World Bank’s response to global challenges. The lending pipeline for the next 18 months includes 46 MPA engagements, of which 23 are expected to support global challenge objectives. Most of these are in Energy and Extractives, Transport, and Water.

Figure 1.1. Multiphase Programmatic Approach Approvals and Commitments



Source: World Bank 2024.

Note: Data cover the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Development Association only and exclude canceled multiphase programmatic approach programs. Fiscal year 2024 is reported only up to the end of the second quarter. Data snapshot is as of December 31, 2023. Panels a and c: Global COVID-19 data are presented separately; 2021 saw a significant decline as the pipeline stalled because of COVID-19 as the priority. Panel b: Data represent the number and volumes of COVID-19 projects under the global multiphase programmatic approach.

1.2 The motivation behind the MPA was to provide continuity of engagement, allow more flexibility in responding to changed circumstances, encourage adaptive learning, and support stepwise progress toward a long-run development objective; it was also intended to reduce processing costs and allow the World Bank to better manage its capital.¹ By signaling a willingness to engage in pursuit of a long-term development objective, it was envisaged that the MPA would strengthen the coherence of World Bank–financed interventions and contribute to building consensus around them on the

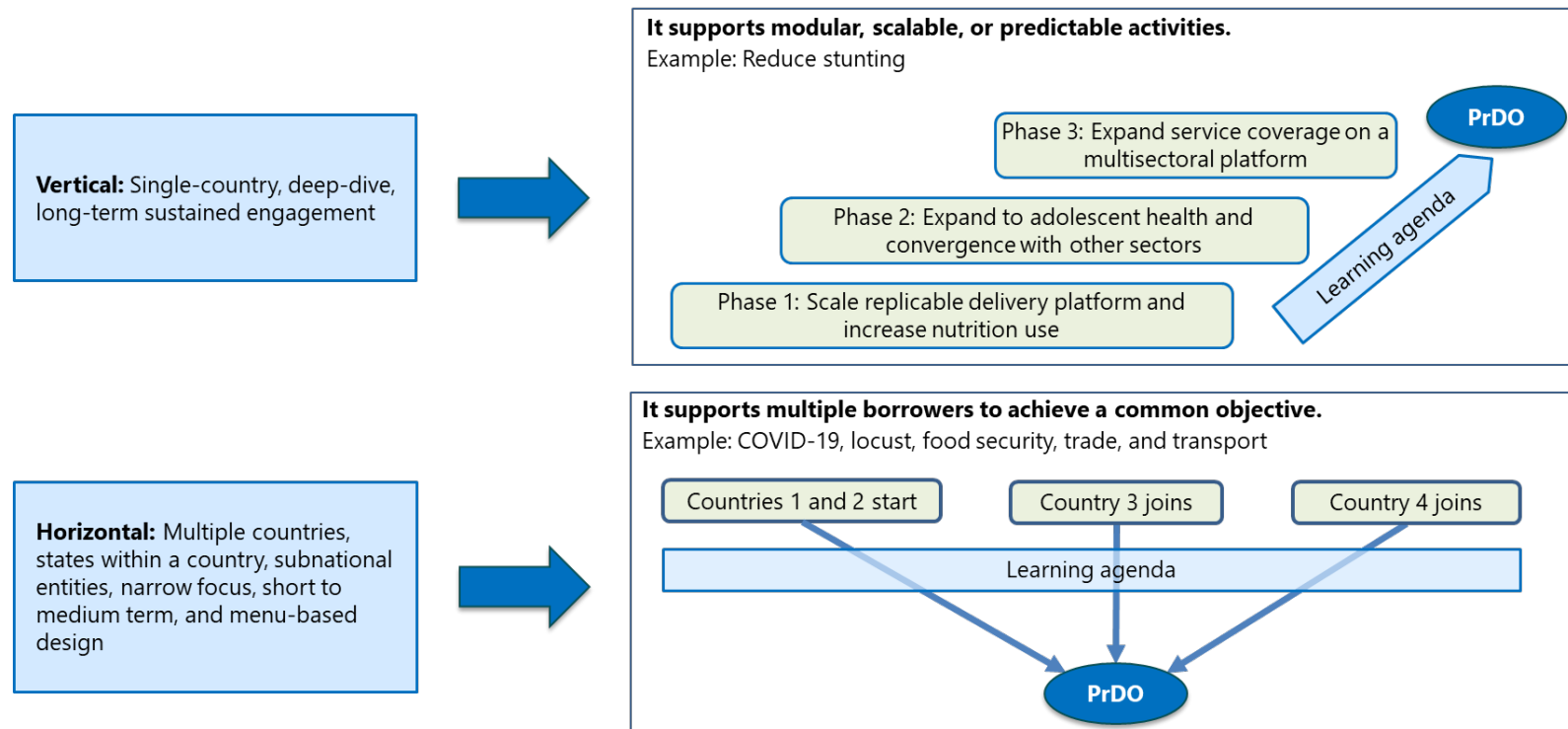
¹ Committing financing in phases rather than up front would enable the World Bank to reduce undisbursed balances and allow borrowers to save on commitment fees; it would also reduce the processing costs of follow-up phases relative to stand-alone operations, especially for guarantees.

client side, while also diminishing the likelihood of interruptions in support between phases. Compared with a single large operation, it would also make adaptation to circumstances easier by incorporating multiple opportunities for reflection and course correction, including the possible cancellation of follow-up phases in the event of a change in country circumstances or priorities. In addition, the MPA would encourage self-reflection by requiring teams to articulate a forward-looking learning agenda. Finally, by sending a signal of long-term support to the government, it was hoped that the approach would mobilize private sector investment, particularly for the energy transition.

1.3 The MPA was originally conceived in two forms: (i) a vertical or single-country form in which a series of sequential or partially overlapping phases allows the World Bank and a client to address a sectoral problem that requires more than one project cycle to achieve results (typically over 8–10 years), the value of the MPA lying in its combination of continuity and flexibility, and (ii) a horizontal or regional form in which each phase supports a country (or a group of countries) with a common theory of change, results framework, and activities with a short- to medium-term focus (4–6 years), the value of the approach consisting in the speed of preparation and implementation enabled by the standardization of operations (figure 1.2). The World Bank used the horizontal MPA in its response to the COVID-19 and locust emergencies. There have also been 11 regional MPAs in East Africa, Europe, South Asia, and West Africa, each involving anything from 4 to 10 countries.²

² The regional multiphase programmatic approach differs from a standard regional operation in that (i) not all phases require the Board of Executive Directors' approval (nor does the addition of a preidentified borrower) and (ii) phases can use Program-for-Results and investment project financing.

Figure 1.2. Types of Multiphase Programmatic Approaches



Source: World Bank 2024.

Note: PrDO = program development objective.

1.4 An important characteristic of the MPA is delegated authority. Whereas the Board of Executive Directors approves the program development objective, overall financing envelope, and details of the first phase, the commitment of financing to subsequent phases is, with some policy exceptions, delegated to management.³ In return for this delegation, Operations Policy and Country Services (OPCS) established certain expectations for how the MPA would be used. These were (i) the existence of an outcome-focused program development objective with stated impact on final beneficiaries (not system strengthening or capacity building); (ii) a robust forward-looking learning agenda, which specified what would be tested during each phase and how; and (iii) an expectation that the first phase will achieve meaningful results and be viable even as a stand-alone operation because there could be no guarantee of continuation to the next.

1.5 The 2017 MPA Board paper also acknowledged that the approach was not without risk and might not suit all borrowers (World Bank 2017). Even if it simplified the World Bank approval process for follow-up phases, the same was not necessarily true on the client side, where legislative consent might be required for all phases. Previous experience with adaptable program loans—a forerunner to the MPA—indicated that client support for long-term programs often turned out to be more subject to electoral cycles or other shifts in priorities than initially presumed. It was also envisaged that the availability and terms of World Bank financing might change during implementation (a country eligible for the International Development Association, for example, might graduate or become a blend country). This could lead a borrower to prefer to lock in current terms and conditions with a single, long-term stand-alone project.

1.6 OPCS oversaw decisions on the choice of the approach through the issuance of formal written guidance, support to task teams, and comments at review meetings. Out of the 153 proposals it received between 2017 and 2022, only 24 were eventually approved as MPAs.⁴ The novelty of the MPA, particularly when used in support of the World Bank’s response to the COVID-19 emergency, demanded an unusual degree of management attention. The COVID-19 evaluation by the Independent Evaluation Group emphasizes the effort it took to establish a program blueprint, provide guidance to teams, streamline approval processes, and coordinate internally (World Bank 2022). The Independent Evaluation Group has not evaluated the MPA, although it has evaluated

³ These exceptions are for investment project financing phases that involve high or substantial environmental and social risks, Program-for-Results phases that introduce new disbursement-linked indicators, changes to the program development objective or the original financing envelope, or the addition of a new borrower under a horizontal program.

⁴ Most of those rejected were approved instead as stand-alone investment project financing or as series of projects.

the World Bank's COVID-19 response and the role of MPAs in supporting learning in lending.

1.7 There has also been an informal OPCS briefing to the Executive Directors. This showed that the COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Program MPA programs took less time to prepare and disburse than emergency non-MPA IPFs, that preparation times for the first phases of MPAs were similar to those for regular IPFs, and that follow-up phases for MPAs were quicker to prepare. It also claimed that MPAs were achieving higher-level results earlier than comparable non-MPA engagements. This evaluation will validate these claims, as outlined in chapter 4. Consequently, OPCS proposed that MPA policy be changed to (i) allow the inclusion of development policy financing and International Finance Corporation and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency instruments and (ii) delegate commitment authority to management for phases involving high- and substantial-risk IPFs and Programs-for-Results that introduced new disbursement-linked indicators.

2. Purpose and Audience

2.1 The objective of this evaluation is to understand whether the use and effectiveness of the MPA have met the expectations of the 2017 Board paper. This is particularly timely given the potential use of MPAs to support the global challenge programs. Its audience is the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors, its Committee on Development Effectiveness, and World Bank Group management and staff working on MPAs. The evaluation has been requested by the Committee on Development Effectiveness (for submission in the first quarter of fiscal year 2025) to inform the Board's ongoing discussions with management on the MPA.

3. Evaluation Scope and Questions

3.1 The evaluation scope is determined both by the short turnaround time for this exercise and by the fact that the MPA portfolio is young. This exercise, therefore, will not seek to address whether the MPA is more likely to achieve long-term outcomes, will not assess the uptake of MPAs or whether there have been "missed opportunities" to apply it, and will not evaluate the suitability of the instrument where it has not been applied. The evaluation will also not address whether expectations of improved coherence on the client side were met or whether to expand the policy scope of the MPA as suggested by OPCS. The pros and cons of delegation of authority in general are outside the scope of this evaluation.

3.2 The evaluation scope is limited to approved nonemergency MPAs as of December 31, 2023. For MPAs approved after that cutoff, rather than address all three proposed evaluation questions, the Independent Evaluation Group may assess design

elements from the perspective of compliance with Board expectations. Out of the 40 nonemergency MPAs, 11 are horizontal and 29 are vertical; 7 have progressed beyond the first phase (3 vertical and 4 horizontal), but none has closed. The exclusion of the emergency response MPAs is mainly because (i) the short time horizon of this evaluation will not permit an expansion of scope to emergency circumstances, which would call for a significantly different evaluation approach, and (ii) the Committee on Development Effectiveness has sufficient information on how the MPA supported crisis response.

3.3 The evaluation questions are proposed as follows:

1. To what extent has the design of MPAs followed Board expectations and management guidance?
 - a. To what extent have the objectives of MPA operations been oriented toward high-level impacts?
 - b. To what extent have MPAs been designed to support institutional development, adaptive management, and learning?
 - c. To what extent do MPAs conform to either the horizontal or vertical models?
2. To what extent have the mechanisms embedded in the MPA worked as expected to achieve its objectives? (See table 3.1.)
 - a. To what extent have they improved the coherence of interventions?
 - b. To what extent have they supported programmatic continuity?
 - c. To what extent have they facilitated and supported monitoring and learning within or across phases?
 - d. To what extent have they supported adaptation to changing circumstances and priorities?
3. Under what circumstances or enabling conditions has the MPA worked as intended?
 - a. To what extent have client-side conditions enabled or prevented the MPA from working as intended?
 - b. To what extent have conditions within the Bank Group enabled or prevented the MPA from working as intended?

Table 3.1. Hypothesized Multiphase Programmatic Approach Mechanisms Associated with Development Effectiveness

Objective	Mechanism	Observable Implications	
		Vertical	Horizontal
Program coherence (World Bank 2017)	Agreement on long-run objectives and constraints across Global Practices	Articulation of long-term objectives that strengthens consensus around them within World Bank team and outcome orientation in CPFs and PLRs; greater cross-sector collaboration on the World Bank and client side (for example, common monitoring arrangements across line agencies and division of phases across World Bank Global Practices) relative to a set of independent operations or single large operation	Identification of a global public good whose provision is being supported that encourages cross-country learning and collaboration, including cross-sector collaboration as in the case of vertical MPAs
Continuity	Greater likelihood of long-term funding	Greater likelihood that client will adopt and invest in long-term objectives relative to a set of independent operations	
Learning	Requirement of learning plan in PAD backed by monitoring and capture of lessons learned	World Bank supervision more oriented toward learning than compliance; more self-evaluation by vertical MPA clients than in a single large operation	More parallel learning across World Bank teams and clients than in a set of independent operations
Adaptation	Multiple points for reflection (Mid-Term Review and the end of each phase) that enable restructuring or cancellation of activities	Earlier cancellation or restructuring in response to changed circumstances and lessons learned than in a single large operation	

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The mechanisms will be refined and expanded during the evaluation. CPF = Country Partnership Framework; MPA = multiphase programmatic approach; PAD = Project Appraisal Document; PLR = Performance and Learning Review.

4. Methods

4.1 The evaluation will use (i) (semi)structured interviews with key informants (World Bank task team leaders, practice managers, country directors, regional directors, directors of strategy and operations and vice presidents, and, time permitting, stakeholders on the client side); (ii) a portfolio review of the 40 approved MPAs and a set of comparator non-MPA operations; and (iii) a desk-based document review (table 4.1).

4.2 Two groups of comparator projects will be selected to minimize the influence of country- and project-specific confounders. They include (i) the most similar operations in the same country for vertical or region for horizontal MPAs and (ii) the most similar operations in a similar context, as measured by the public administration Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (fiscal years 2018–22). Project similarity is calculated as the

cosine distance of mean text embeddings from the project description section of Project Appraisal Documents from that of reference projects.

Table 4.1. Basic Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Subquestion	Source of Information	Methods	Limitations
Design and compliance with expectations			
To what extent have the objectives of MPA operations been oriented toward high-level impacts?	<p>PDO indicators align with or clearly build toward PrDOs.</p> <p>Theories of change laid out in the project document are conducive to pursuing long-term objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portfolio analysis: document review Use of methodology developed for gauging outcome orientation in <i>RAP 2021</i> Structured and semistructured interviews to validate any unusual findings 	<p>We will assess compliance with expectations set out in the 2017 Board paper (World Bank 2017) at the design stage only; thus, it will limit some of the conclusions we can draw with respect to elements of compliance, but they may be relevant later in the MPA process.</p>
To what extent have MPAs been designed to support institutional development, adaptive management, and learning?	<p>PADs, ISRs, and data from structured interviews will be used to interrogate alignment of implementation, M&E, and institutional arrangements with MPA objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document review IEG evaluation of learning from lending 	
To what extent do MPAs conform to either the horizontal or vertical models?	<p>PADs and interviews will be used.</p>		
Expected mechanisms associated with achieving objectives			
To what extent have these mechanisms improved the coherence of interventions?	<p>PADs, CPFs, and PLRs should indicate a logic framework that articulates the link among country analytics, strategy, and MPA. CPFs and PLRs should demonstrate stronger outcome orientation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review of strategic documents and selected advisory services and analytics 	<p>General: Most MPAs are at an early stage of implementation, with only seven having graduated to the second or third phase; thus, we cannot assess longer-term results or effectiveness, which will limit some of the conclusions we can draw.</p>
To what extent have these mechanisms supported programmatic continuity?	<p>PDO and PrDO indicators, institutional arrangements for M&E, and interview data should indicate consistent measurable progress toward long-term development objective(s) and long-term assurance of support leading to greater continuity on the client side in terms of staffing and capacity building.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review of project documents Portfolio analysis Interviews 	<p>To mitigate this issue and be able to draw meaningful conclusions with respect to results, we will focus on observable implications within earlier phases of the MPAs.</p> <p>Interviews: The team will take care to mitigate potential interview biases (for example, selection bias, social desirability bias, and confirmation bias) via proper</p>

Evaluation Subquestion	Source of Information	Methods	Limitations
To what extent have these mechanisms facilitated and supported monitoring and learning within or across phases?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning plans articulated in PADs ISR reporting of implementation of learning plans Interview data Information on institutional arrangements for generating, managing, and communicating knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of learning plans, project documents, ISRs, and aide-mémoire Structured and semistructured interviews IEG evaluation of learning from lending 	<p>selection of interviewees, projects, and interview questions.</p> <p>With respect to project selection, there are many variables along which MPA projects differ, some of which are confounders for effectiveness outcomes. We would ideally like to control for these as much as possible but are limited by a small number of MPA projects. Given the small number, we cannot stratify the data based on too many variables.</p>
To what extent have these mechanisms supported adaptation to changing circumstances and priorities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restructuring papers Interview data Mid-Term Review aide-mémoire for data on progress toward long-run development objective, ambition, relevance, and efficacy of PDO indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document review Structured and semistructured interviews Document review and coding of results indicators for operations that have completed the first phase 	<p>To mitigate this, we will create a typology based on critical dimensions of variation, then rely on random selection within each cell.</p> <p>The short project timeline will also limit the overall number of interviews we can perform. We will rely on a points of saturation strategy to make sure we obtain all needed information with a smaller number of interviews.</p>
Enabling conditions			
To what extent have client-side conditions enabled or prevented the MPA from working as intended?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data on country and sector context Assessment of client capacity and demand in PADs and other project documents Implementation-related data in ISRs Interview data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document review Data and portfolio analysis Structured and semistructured interviews 	<p>Data on sector and country context, including capacity, are at the country level, whereas our outcomes of interest are at the project level. Depending on how the projects are clustered geographically, there may be too little variation in the country context variables to draw meaningful conclusions.</p> <p>We will rely on more granular information obtained during interviews to mitigate some of these concerns.</p>

Evaluation Subquestion	Source of Information	Methods	Limitations
To what extent have conditions within the World Bank Group enabled or prevented the MPA from working as intended?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview data • Data on budget allocations versus spending for horizontal MPAs • Data on rejected proposals, including whether these proposals were developed into stand-alone operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured and semistructured interviews with task team leaders and practice managers 	<p>Social desirability bias is a potential concern because we are trying to obtain information on internal conditions.</p> <p>To mitigate this concern, we will formulate interview questions that highlight “process” as opposed to “opinions.”</p>

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The evaluation matrix will be reviewed from the perspective of tractability and feasibility given four months from launch to World Bank management submission. CPF = Country Partnership Framework; IEG = Independent Evaluation Group; ISR = Implementation Status and Results Report; M&E = monitoring and evaluation; MPA = multiphase programmatic approach; PAD = Project Appraisal Document; PDO = project development objective; PLR = Performance and Learning Review; PrDO = program development objective; RAP = *Results and Performance of the World Bank Group*.

4.3 The overall limitations of this evaluation are (i) that no MPA has closed (that is, we cannot evaluate its achievement of program development objectives) and (ii) that only seven MPAs have progressed from the first to the second or third phase (that is, we are constrained in evaluating the mechanisms on which their effectiveness depends).

5. Quality Assurance and Resources

The evaluation will be led by Rashmi Shankar, under the supervision of Theo Thomas. Team members are Andrea Rojas Hosse, Sengphet Lattanavong, Diana Stanescu, Marwane Zouaidi, and Harsh Anuj. Rasmus Heltberg will be advising the team. The team will engage with Estelle Raimondo (the head of methods) on a regular basis, given the tight timeline of the evaluation. The completed report is scheduled to be submitted to the Committee on Development Effectiveness in the first quarter of fiscal year 2025. The estimated budget is US\$250,000.

References

World Bank. 2017. "Multiphase Programmatic Approach." Board Report 117742, World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/203081501525641125/multiphase-programmatic-approach>.

World Bank. 2022. *The World Bank's Early Support to Addressing COVID-19: Health and Social Response – An Early-Stage Evaluation*. Independent Evaluation Group. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank. 2024. "Multiphase Programmatic Approach." Technical Briefing to the Board of Executive Directors, January 2024, World Bank, Washington, DC.

Appendix A. Interview Design and Selection Strategy

We plan to leverage semistructured and structured interviews for all evaluation questions either to validate any unexpected results that come up from desk review or to dig deeper into mechanisms or uncover pathways of change where other sources of data are scarce. Interview data will be rigorously coded and presented. Given the short timeline, we will start with a low number of interviews and increase it if we do not reach saturation with respect to the types of answers we obtain. We plan to focus on the 40 nonemergency multiphase programmatic approach (MPA) projects, selecting respondents for all horizontal MPAs (4 out of 11 horizontal MPAs have progressed beyond the first phase) and from a sample of the vertical MPAs.

We will use a purposive sampling strategy to select vertical MPAs for interviews as follows. First, we will create a typology of projects based on two dimensions of variation: (i) level of institutional maturity and (ii) nature of intervention. We will classify projects based on qualitative assessment because the scope and timeline of the evaluation (and limited number of MPA projects) render a more complex, machine learning–based classification exercise not optimal. Second, we will select two to three projects from each cell (institutional maturity and nature of intervention) to maximize our chances of gathering evidence around our evaluation questions. For example, we plan to include all projects that have advanced beyond the first phase.

For the subset of questions where we intend to highlight points of divergence or convergence in task team leaders', country directors', and clients' perspective, we want to obtain triangulated information on three to four questions, with the goal of obtaining quantifiable data by stakeholder group. In practice, these structured questions would approximate a mini-survey (as opposed to open questions). We would be asking questions such as, "If you were to tell me on a scale of 1–5 how well the MPA served its pursuit of long-term outcomes...?"

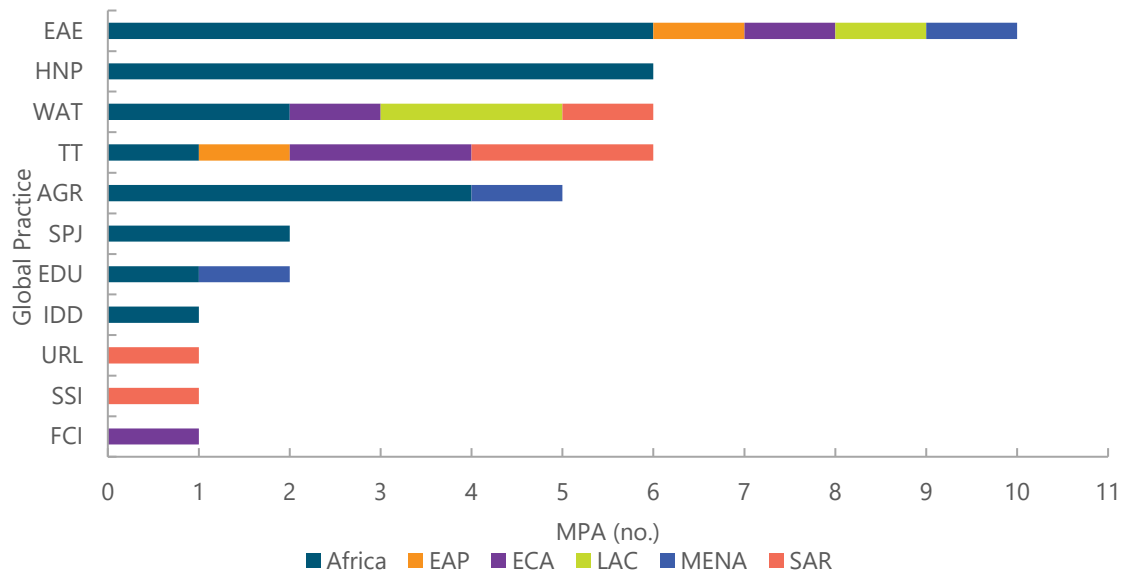
Additional Considerations

- In regard to stakeholders, we plan to start with task team leaders with experience on both the MPA and non-MPA side. We want to make sure to interview task team leaders, country directors, and stakeholders on the client side.
- Group interviews may be useful, particularly on the operating environment.

Appendix B. Initial Multiphase Programmatic Approach Portfolio Breakdown

This evaluation will assess 40 nonemergency multiphase programmatic approaches (MPAs), of which 29 are vertical and 11 are horizontal. In terms of regional distribution of the broader MPA portfolio, Africa leads the Regions with 23 MPAs, followed by Europe and Central Asia and South Asia with 5 each (figure B.1). The Energy and Extractives Global Practice leads the portfolio with 10 MPAs, followed by the Health, Nutrition, and Population; Transport; and Water Global Practices leading 6 MPAs each.

Figure B.1. Overall Multiphase Programmatic Approach Portfolio, by Region and Global Practice



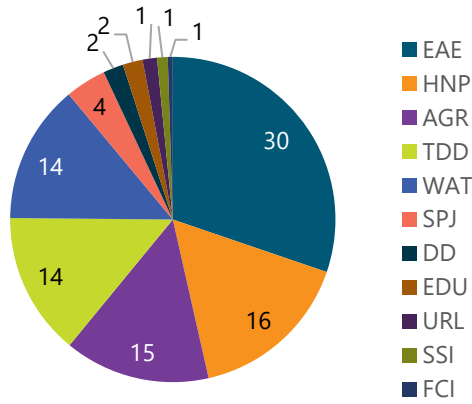
Source: Independent Evaluation Group staff analysis of World Bank data.

Note: AGR = Agriculture and Food; EAE = Energy and Extractives; EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; EDU = Education; FCI = Finance, Competitiveness, and Innovation; HNP = Health, Nutrition, and Population; IDD = Digital Development; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; MPA = multiphase programmatic approach; SAR = South Asia; SPJ = Social Protection and Jobs; SSI = Social Sustainability and Inclusion; TT = Transport; URL = Urban, Disaster Risk Management, Resilience, and Land; WAT = Water.

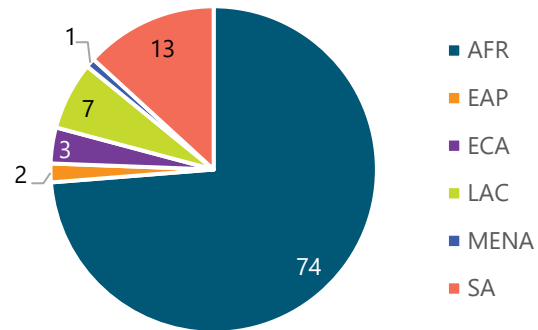
In terms of program financing, as demonstrated in figure B.2, the Africa Region leads the MPA portfolio with 74 percent of total funding (US\$20,854.1 million), followed by South Asia with 13 percent (US\$3,731.45 million) and Latin America and the Caribbean with 7 percent (US\$1,905 million). The Energy and Extractives Global Practice leads the Global Practices by funding, with 30 percent of total MPA funding, followed by the Health, Nutrition, and Population and the Agriculture and Food Global Practices.

Figure B.2. Multiphase Programmatic Approach Total Commitments at Board Approval, by Region and Global Practice

a. Program financing by Global Practice (percent)



b. Program financing by Region (percent)



Source: Independent Evaluation Group staff analysis of World Bank project data.

Note: AFR = Africa; AGR = Agriculture and Food; DD = Digital Development; EAE = Energy and Extractives; EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; EDU = Education; FCI = Finance, Competitiveness, and Innovation; HNP = Health, Nutrition, and Population; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; SA = South Asia; SPJ = Social Protection and Jobs; SSI = Social Sustainability and Inclusion; TDD = Transport and Digital Development; URL = Urban, Disaster Risk Management, Resilience, and Land; WAT = Water.

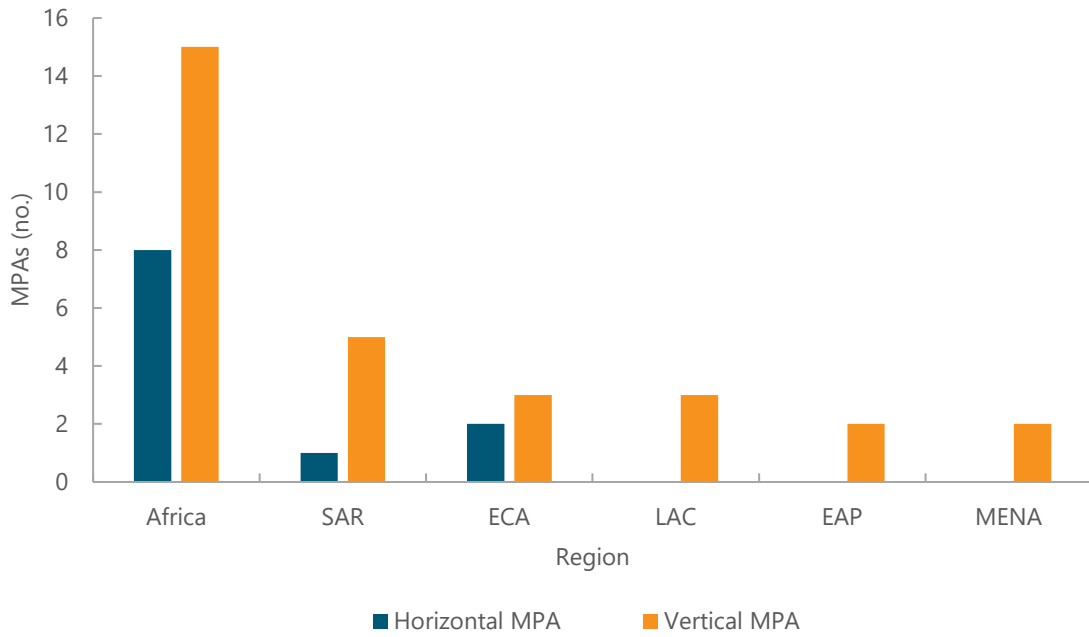
Vertical

A total of 25 out of 29 vertical MPAs are in countries eligible for the International Development Association. In addition, about half the portfolio of vertical MPAs are in lower-middle-income countries (14 out of 29), whereas 31 percent are in upper-middle-income countries (9 out of 29) and 21 percent in low-income countries (6 out of 29).

Horizontal

Africa leads all Regions (figure B.3) with 72 percent of the horizontal portfolio (8 out of 11), followed by Europe and Central Asia with 18 percent (2 out of 11) and South Asia with 10 percent (1 out of 11).

Figure B.3. Regional Distribution of Multiphase Programmatic Approaches, by Category



Source: Independent Evaluation Group staff analysis of World Bank project data.

Note: EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; MPA = multiphase programmatic approach; SAR = South Asia.