



1. Project Data

Project ID

P122398

Project Name

Central African Backbone-APL3 - Congo Rp

Country

Africa

Practice Area(Lead)

Digital Development

L/C/TF Number(s)

IDA-49740,IDA-59910

Closing Date (Original)

31-Dec-2016

Total Project Cost (USD)

18,679,030.61

Bank Approval Date

25-May-2011

Closing Date (Actual)

28-Feb-2019

IBRD/IDA (USD)
Grants (USD)

Original Commitment

15,000,000.00

0.00

Revised Commitment

20,000,000.00

0.00

Actual

18,679,030.61

0.00

Prepared by
Ranga Rajan
Krishnamani
Reviewed by

Kavita Mathur

ICR Review Coordinator

Ramachandra Jammi

Group

IEGSD (Unit 4)

2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The Project Development Objective (PDO) as stated in the Financing Agreement (Schedule 1, page 5) and the Project Appraisal Document (PAD, page 16) was "to contribute to increase geographical coverage and usage of regional broadband network services and reduce their prices".



This assessment is based on the three sub-objectives: (1) To contribute to increase geographical coverage of regional broadband network services; (2) To contribute to reduce the prices of regional broadband network services; and (3) To contribute to increase the usage of regional broadband network services.

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?

No

d. Components

This project was the third phase of Central African Backbone (CAB) regional program, aimed at increasing the geographical reach and usage of regional broadband network services and reducing their prices in the Republic of Congo (RoC). The other countries in the program included Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic. There were four components (PAD, paragraph 21).

1. Enabling environment at the regional and national levels (estimated cost at appraisal US\$3.5 million; actual cost US\$3.5 million). This component was expected to finance technical assistance (TA) activities for developing the legal framework in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. Activities included: (i) strengthening the regulatory framework of key stakeholders (the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and the Regulatory Agency for Post and Electronic Communications (ARPCE); (ii) promoting Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and an Open Access regime; (iii) designing a strategic plan for restructuring Congo Telecom; and (iv) designing and implementing a management policy for ".cg" domain name in RoC.

2. Connectivity (estimated cost at appraisal US\$9.0 million; actual cost US\$12.4 million). This component was expected to finance following activities: (i) CAB related environmental and resettlement consultancies; (ii) three inter-regional links to neighboring countries, Gabon (through the Dolisie-Mbinda link), Cameroon (the Oyo - Ouessou link) and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (the Brazzaville-Kinshasa link); and (iii) establishing national and regional Internet Exchange Points (IXPs).

3. Promotion of ICT sector (estimated cost at appraisal US\$1.0 million; actual cost US\$2.2 million). This component aimed at building ICT skills and creating business opportunities for local ICT firms. Activities included: (i) TA for developing information laws and "cyber" legal framework; (ii) promoting ICT start-up firms through a business incubator approach; and (iii) financing a study for designing and developing an interoperable platform for mobile and electronic applications (e.g. m-banking).

4. Project Management (estimated cost at appraisal US\$1.0 million; actual cost US\$1.5 million). This component would provide management support in areas relating to human resources, procurement, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, internal and external audit and communications expertise.



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

Project cost. The estimated cost at appraisal was US\$30.0 million. Revised estimate with Additional Financing (AF) was US\$35.0 million. The actual cost was US\$33.7 million.

Project financing. The project was financed by an IDA credit of US\$15.0 million. AF of US\$5.0 million was approved on March 30, 2017. With this the total IDA credit for the project was US\$20.0 million. The actual amount disbursed was US\$18.7 million. The difference between the credit at appraisal and actual disbursements was due to exchange rate changes during implementation.

Borrower contribution. The borrower contribution at appraisal was estimated at US\$15.0 million. The actual contribution was as planned.

Dates. The project was approved on May 2011, became effective six months later on December 19, 2011 and was scheduled to close on December 31, 2016. AF was approved on March 30, 2017. The project closed about two years later on February 28, 2019.

Other changes. There were five level 2 restructurings.

The **first restructuring** on March 17, 2015 substantially modified the scope of component one, two and three and following activities were dropped:

(i) TA for restructuring Congo Telecom was dropped for a combination of factors, including studies that showed that costs of these activities could not be supported by the project and lack of responsiveness of Congo Telecom;

(ii) Of the planned three links with neighboring countries, the links with Cameroon and DRC, were dropped for factors such as, cost overruns of construction activities, exacerbated by exchange rate changes between the C.F.A. Franc and the US\$ during implementation, on-going crisis in Central African Republic that halted all major infrastructure projects in the country, and delays on the Cameroon side; and

(iii) The activities of establishing e and m platforms and promoting ICT startup firms through a business incubator approach was dropped, as feasibility studies showed that costs for these activities exceeded the provision made for these activities.

Funds released from the dropping of these activities were reallocated to cover the costs of extending the infrastructure to Pointe-Noire and the project coordination unit.

The **second restructuring** on November 29, 2016 extended the closing date by 18 months to June 30, 2018 to facilitate the preparation of an AF for financing component two activities that could not be covered through counterpart funding as planned.

Following the approval of AF, the **third restructuring** on March 30, 2017 added a new activity which aimed at establishing a Digital Development Fund and the closing date was extended by six months to December 30, 2019.



The **fourth restructuring** on November 6, 2018 resulted in: (i) reallocation of AF funds among project components to cover a financing gap due to the government's budget constraints; and (ii) cancellation of some component three activities (such as establishing a Digital Development Fund).

The **fifth restructuring** on March 21, 2019 changed the closing dates for the original and AF. The closing date was brought forward from December 20, 2019 to February 28, 2019, following the completion of activities as per the previous restructuring.

Split rating. The PDO indicators were not revised. However, the results framework was modified and intermediate indicators were added following the first and second restructurings to account for new activities planned under component three. These new activities were subsequently removed from the results framework following the third restructuring. A split rating assessment will not be undertaken.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

Country context. The RoC's strong economic performance in the years before appraisal was oil-driven, with little diversification. Stimulating development of non-oil sectors, such as the ICT sector, was part of the government's long-term economic diversification effort for sustaining economic growth. In the ICT sector, while competition in the mobile market had increased mobile coverage in major cities, coverage remained low in areas outside major population centers. Most telecommunications operators in the region did not have broadband terrestrial networks and relied on expensive and poor-quality satellite connectivity to link cities at the national level. Mobile broadband access was low (with only 15,000 internet subscribers) and operators offered limited access. The main obstacles affecting the sector, included incomplete market liberalization and absence of national backbone infrastructure. These constraints impinged on the countries' ability to trade with others, create new jobs, and expand production of goods and services.

Government and regional strategy. The PDO was consistent with the Government's strategic vision for the ICT sector – *Cyberstrategy*, which was issued in 2008-2009. This strategy promoted the ICT sector as an opportunity for non-oil diversification of the economy and an engine for job creation and provided a road map for ICT connectivity. The PDO supported three areas identified in the strategy: (i) developing the legal framework; (ii) implementing a broadband network; and (iii) capacity development of the regulatory agency. The strategy also identified the need for creating ICT for micro and small and medium enterprises. The PDOs were aligned to the target 18 of the Millennium Development Goals of making available the benefits of new technologies in the ICT sector to the population.

In the regional context, the PDO was consistent with the declaration adopted by the Central African Economic and Monetary Committee (CEMAC) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), of creating an integrated and competitive economic space in Central Africa. In particular the project contributed to the implementation of the third pillar of the 2010-2015 CEMAC Regional Economic Program relating to physical inter-connectivity of its member countries.

Alignment with the Bank's country and regional strategy. The PDO was well-aligned with the Bank strategy. The Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for 2010-2012, underscored the need for providing a



foundation for increasing RoC's market share in regional transit services, reducing prices of broadband network, building ICT skills and extending economic opportunities in the local ICT industry. The PDO was aligned with the Bank's Regional Integration Assistance Strategy for Africa (RIAS) at appraisal. The RIAS issued in 2004, underscored the need for improving connectivity for effective regional economic integration and improving competitiveness of African countries. The project was also aligned with the ongoing CPS for 2013-2016. The competitiveness and employment pillar of the current CPS underscored the need for improving regional telecommunications. The PDO continues to be relevant to the Bank strategy. The first strategic focus area of the Country Partnership Framework (CPF), approved by the Board in December 2019 for the 2020-2024 period, highlighted the need for strengthening economic management to create an improved climate for private-sector led growth, through activities that boost productivity within sectors like ICT and agriculture (CPF, pages 24-25). The new CPF also included provisions for supporting the governments Digital Vision 2025.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

To contribute to increase geographical coverage of regional broadband network services.

Rationale

Theory of Change. The project activities included capacity building activities and infrastructure investments, and the causal links between activities, outputs and outcomes were logical and the intended outcomes were measurable. Strengthening the legal and regulatory framework, promoting an Open Access and PPP regimes, and establishing a special purpose vehicle for the ICT infrastructure, were aimed at fostering competition in the sector. Setting interregional links and Internet Exchange Points, were aimed at improving RoC's telecommunication infrastructure and interconnections with neighboring countries. Strengthening the ICT institutional framework, setting an ICT business incubator and TA for developing an interoperable platform for digital development platform, were aimed at improving the efficiency of processing transactions. These activities together were likely to increase the geographical reach of regional broadband network services, reduce prices and contribute to increased usage of broadband services.

Outputs (ICR paragraphs 39-42).

- The project had initially underestimated the construction costs. The construction of 505 km fiber optic network connecting RoC and Gabon was completed in 2018. This link was extended from 338 km to 520 km to along the railway lines and to connect directly with the West Africa Cable System (WACS) landing station near Pointe- Noire. However, although completed, the network was not yet commercialized due to delays associated with the two national regulators. According to the information provided subsequently by the team, this issue has not yet been resolved to date. The



regional link to Cameroon (420 km) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (10km) was dropped, as the funding (original IDA, plus AF, plus counterpart funding) was adequate for only the segment connecting RoC and Gabon.

- These activities were completed as targeted: (i) a broadband strategy was delivered in 2013 and was adopted by the government; (ii) studies on homologation of equipment and portability were completed and implemented; (iii) an observatory was put in place in 2013 for monitoring the telecom industry and is producing quarterly reports; and (iv) a frequency management plan for international broadband access and ICT sector development was adopted by the Regulatory Agency for Post and Electronic Communications.

Outcomes

- The international internet bandwidth (bits per second person) increased from 51 in 2010 (baseline) to 3,341 at project closure and 15,500 in December 2019, far exceeding the target of 500.
- 97% of the population had mobile network coverage when the project closed. This exceeded the target of 95%.
- 50 localities had broadband internet access when the project closed (baseline was 4). This exceeded the target of 10.
- The core pillars of the CAB regional program - the PPP arrangement to maintain the regional infrastructure and establishing an Open Access Regime - were not realized when the project closed, due to political economy considerations.
- Despite the interconnection between Gabon and the RoC being operational, no traffic was exchanged between the two countries.
- None of the operators and service providers were buying capacity from the deployed regional infrastructure when the project closed (target three).

Rating

Modest

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

To contribute to reduce the prices of regional broadband network services.

Rationale

The theory of Change for this objective is the same as the one discussed under the first objective.

Outputs (ICR, paragraphs 44- 45).



- TA on taxation mechanisms to improve the price of internet access was completed as targeted.
- TA was provided to improve the pricing for internet access.
- The Congo Internet Exchange (CGIX) became functional in 2013. Two Internet Exchange Points and two operators were connected. Training was provided on Border Gateway protocol routing.
- As described above (under objective 1), the regional network infrastructure between RoC and Gabon (intended to increase international traffic) was not complete when the project closed. The infrastructure was intended to increase international traffic and contribute to the achievement of this objective by increasing regional competition and thereby decreasing costs. Similarly, the Open Access regime, which is yet to be adopted, was expected to foster competition in the broadband wholesale market and lower prices also as a result (ICR para 45).

Outcomes

- Average monthly price of wholesale international capacity link from the capital city to Europe reduced from US\$3,200 in December 2010 to US\$892 in February 2019, short of the target of US\$800.
- The retail price of internet service (per 256 kbit/per month) dropped from US\$300 in 2010 to US\$74 in February 2019. This was short of the target of US\$70.
- The average cost of mobile call (three minutes at local peak time) dropped from US\$0.50 at the baseline to US\$0.16 in February 2019. This was short of the target of US\$0.10.

Through project-financed technical assistance to the regulator, the project achieved some progress in contributing to reduce the price of broadband services. The retail price of internet service did decrease significantly, and the target was 98 percent achieved. However, the PDO indicator of average monthly price of wholesale international E1 capacity was achieved at 75 percent. The achievement of this objective is rated modest.

Rating
Modest

OBJECTIVE 3

Objective

To contribute to increase the usage of regional broadband network services.

Rationale

Theory of Change: The activities described above to increase the geographical reach of regional broadband network services and reduce prices were expected to contribute to the increased usage of broadband services. The technical assistance for the development of cybersecurity, privacy, promotion of the ICT sector, promotion of ICT start-up firms through a business incubator approach and development of an interoperable



platform for m- and e-applications, were expected to contribute to increase the usage of regional broadband network services.

Outputs (ICR, paragraphs 46 -49).

- The project assisted in the implementation of the management of the Congolese domain name “.cg”. The goal was to develop a local ecosystem and local content. About 27 government websites and over 630 local domain names were created and are currently being used.
- Twelve institutes of the Marien Ngouabi university were provided with fiber inter-connection. This provided access to nearly 30,000 students and teaching and administrative staff. The university launched *e-schooling*, enabling students to register online.
- The Marien Ngouabi university launched the University of Innovation in Technologies and Services (PUITS) Program. This program was a digital center aimed at supporting ICT projects and helping young entrepreneurs. In January 2018, the program received over 900 applications for 30 ICT trainings. The PUITS also served as an incubator through a partnership between the Regulatory Agency for Post and Electronic Communication and the International Organization of Francophone (OIF).
- The legal and regulatory framework relating to the "cyber strategy" were completed as targeted.
- The 2025 Digital Strategy (Vision Congo Digital 2025), developed under the project, was published by decree 2019-150 on June 17, 2019. This strategy contained three pillars: e-Citizen, e-Government and e-Business.

Outcomes

- The number of internet subscribers per 100 people increased from 6.1 at the baseline in December 2010 to 42 in December 2018, exceeding the target of 40.
- The number of beneficiaries (defined as people who were connected to the internet or more generally to the communications network), increased from 50,000 at the baseline in December 2010 to 2,119,873 at closure. This represented a 23% increase relative to the target of 1,732,021. 35% of the beneficiaries were women as compared to the target of 37%.

Rating
Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY
Rationale



The PDOs were not ambitious and the project outcome indicators measuring the objectives exceeded the targets, as the price of internet in RoC was too high at appraisal. Although the project contributed to reducing the internet price, the internet price remains high to date because (a) the ICT market in RoC does not have a real competitive environment, and (b) open access principles were not implemented and this negatively impacts on internet price.

Overall Efficacy Rating
Modest

Primary Reason
Low achievement

5. Efficiency

Economic analysis. An Leontief intersectoral Input-Output (IO) analysis was conducted at appraisal. The IO analysis is used to demonstrate how industries are linked together through supplying inputs for the output of the economy and to assess the relative significance of a sector in terms of its final impact on output, incomes and employment. The Leontief analysis showed that investment in broadband infrastructure has a significant impact on employment and economic growth in RoC. Specifically, the final demand of C.F.A Francs (XAF) one billion (equivalent of US\$1,895,849) for the Post and Telecommunication Industry was expected to contribute to a total impact of XAF 1.29 billion (US\$2,448,768). The result revealed that the Post and Telecommunication industry has a strong forward linkage and hence is a leading sector in the economy. This result indicated that increase in government spending would have a tremendous impact on the rest of the economy and adopting ICT in all the other sectors will boost economic growth. This methodology was not replicated at closure. According to World Bank research, each 10% increase in broadband penetration in developing countries was expected to increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 1.38%.

The ICR (paragraph 51) notes that while GDP in RoC grew in the years following the implementation of this project, it decreased in 2016 and 2017.

No financial analysis was carried out. The ICR stated (para 53) that it was not possible to carry out a financial analysis as no business plan or financial model was developed for the operationalization of the network constructed by this project.

Administrative and Operational inefficiencies. The project became effective on December 19, 2011, three months after the initial planned date of September 12, 2011. Since a year was spent on completing studies for component one activities, implementation of these activities could start only in 2013. Costs of several activities were underestimated, and these were exacerbated by exchange rate changes and delays in counterpart funding. These factors contributed to a drastic reduction in scope of project activities. The political resistance to creating a Special Purpose Vehicle and establishing PPP, adversely impacted the utilization of the regional network. At closure, the project was not able to implement the Open Access regime and PPP principles of the CAB program, fell short of the targets for the reduction in prices of broadband services and did not reap the economic and financial benefits of the regional infrastructure.

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		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

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

6. Outcome

The relevance of the PDO to the government and the Bank strategy is rated as high. The efficacy of the sub-objective "to increase the usage of regional broadband network services" is rated as substantial and the efficacy of the two objectives "to increase geographical coverage" and "reduce prices of regional broadband network services" are rated as modest. The efficiency is rated as modest in view of the administrative and operational shortcomings which contributed to non-completion of many activities.

a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Unsatisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

Government commitment. The regional network was not commercialized when the project closed. There is substantial risk associated with the commercialization of the regional network, given that the government still needs to finalize policy agreements with neighboring countries to enable international traffic to flow.

Institutional risk. There is substantial risk that the regulatory environment will not continue to develop favorably to achieve lower, affordable prices for broadband services. The ICR reports (para 86) that the regulator has capacity to effectively regulate the market, but the use of price floors in recent years suggests a substantial risk to the achievement of lower, affordable prices for broadband.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

This project was prepared based on the ongoing policy dialogue in the ICT sector in RoC since 2008 and lessons from prior- Bank financed ICT projects in the region. Lessons incorporated at design, included TA to implement a PPP for managing and operating the network capacity. Several risks were



identified at appraisal, including risks associated with the PPP scheme, risks associated with noncompletion of the national backbone infrastructure which the CAB was to connect, and governance risk. Mitigation measures incorporated at design included, a hybrid PPP model that would allow the government to maintain ownership of infrastructure while delegating its management; developing a legal framework and tools to support the enforcement capacity of regulators (PAD, paragraph 37). With these mitigation measures, project risk was rated as moderate at appraisal. The implementation arrangements were appropriate, with the Project Coordination Unit housed in the premises of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, the main implementing agency (PAD, page 39). Appropriate arrangements were made at appraisal for monitoring and evaluation and safeguards and fiduciary compliance (discussed in section 9 and 10).

There were moderate shortcomings at Quality-at-Entry. Costs were underestimated, with the actual cost of several activities being much higher than anticipated. The cost overruns exacerbated by exchange rate changes and delays in counterpart funding, contributed to significant reduction in project scope. The project underestimated the political resistance to PPP principles in the CAB program and this undermined the regional dimensions of the program. Unlike in other subsequent CAB projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon, this project did not have covenants or binding conditions for activities such as an Open Access regime, PPP and Special Purpose Vehicle. This undermined the crucial elements of the CAB program.

Quality-at-Entry Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

The ICR (paragraph 83) notes that the task team leader was based in Brazzaville from 2016 to 2017 and 25 supervision missions were conducted during the lifetime of the project. The missions were complemented by remote support. The team was proactive in responding to the challenging context in the RoC (such as when the government was not able to provide counterpart funding), and by finalizing AF for the project. Issues were identified in a timely manner and the progress of project implementation and discussions with the government were documented through detailed Aide Memoires. The training of the PIU staff on financial management, procurement, and safeguards aided in safeguards and fiduciary compliance (discussed in section 10).

Given the challenges encountered during implementation due to the political environment and governance risks, the mitigation measures could have been modified to reflect these risks.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Moderately Satisfactory



9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The key outcome indicators for this project were the same as the outcome indicators for the CAB regional program and were standard quantitative ones that covered geographical reach, usage and price of ICT services. The four key outcome indicators - volume of international traffic, the number of internet subscribers, the average price of international communications and the number of direct project beneficiaries, were in principle, measurable. The selected indicators had baseline figures and clear targets, against which progress towards objectives could be assessed. The Post and Communications Regulatory Agency was responsible for data collection. The PAD (paragraph 71) notes that a M&E system was to be set up within the Project Coordination Unit for monitoring project performance.

b. M&E Implementation

Although the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) did not have a M&E specialist for a year in 2012, this was rectified by 2013. After initial bottlenecks, a detailed quarterly report was produced, with data collected by ARPCE.

Following the reduction in scope of project activities, targets were appropriately modified through project restructurings. The ICR (paragraph 72) notes that some new and original indicators (the number of kilometers of fiber optic laid out and the number of urban zones connected to the backbone) were not consistently tracked and eventually these indicators were removed.

c. M&E Utilization

The M&E data was used for adjusting indicators during implementation and monitoring performance at closure. The data collected was also used for the team's ongoing dialogue with the regulator on pricing. The ICR (paragraph 72) notes that the M&E framework served as the basis for finalizing the regulatory texts on price floors and that pricing data continues to be collected by the Regulatory Agency for Post and Telecommunication. However, the growth in GDP in the years following the implementation of this project could not be directly attributable to the project (discussed in section 5).

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project was classified as a Category B project under World Bank safeguard policies. Five safeguard policies were triggered at appraisal: Environmental Assessment (OP/BP 4.04); Natural Habitats (OP 4.04);



Indigenous Peoples Policy (OP 4.10); Physical Cultural Resources (OP 4.11); and Involuntary Resettlement (OP 4.12) (PAD, paragraph 25). The PAD (paragraph 61) noted that the environmental and social impacts of the project, were expected to be minimal and site-specific. An Environmental and Social Management Framework, a Resettlement Plan Framework and an Indigenous People Planning Framework, were prepared and publicly-disclosed at appraisal (PAD, paragraph 50). Specific Environmental Management Plan, Indigenous People Development Plan and a Resettlement Action Plan, were to be prepared as required during implementation.

There was compliance with environmental and social safeguards during implementation. There were no environmental issues. Regarding resettlement, after the first inventory of lost property in 2015, compensation was paid to all concerned in April 2016. 21 complaints were recorded in 2016 as a result of the damage suffered by the destruction of trees and fields, particularly in sections 5 and 6, between Makabana and Mbinda. All complaints were resolved by August 30, 2016.

An audit conducted in March 2017 recommended creation of a functional Grievance Redress Mechanism for addressing additional complaints. This mechanism was implemented by the project and by December 2018, compensation had been made to the targeted communities (ICR, paragraph 77).

The ICR did not provide any details on the implementation of other safeguards.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial management. An assessment of the implementing agency's ability to address financial management issues was conducted at appraisal. The assessment revealed minor weaknesses in staffing arrangements and capacity issues and the financial risk was rated as medium (PAD, page 41). Mitigation measures incorporated at design, included recruiting an experienced financial management specialist and accountant. A financial management plan was prepared at appraisal (PAD, page 46). There was compliance with financial management during implementation. A World Bank financial management specialist based in the Brazzaville country office supported the project through implementation. There were no financial issues and unmodified audits were submitted in a timely fashion.

Procurement. An assessment of the implementing agency's ability to address procurement issues was conducted at appraisal (PAD, page 54). The procurement risks identified at appraisal, included a weak governance environment and overall lack of transparency in conducting procurement. Mitigation measures incorporated at design, included public disclosure of relevant information through a project website at the country level and conducting a workshop for relevant staff. A procurement plan was prepared and publicly-disclosed at appraisal and the plan was to be updated as required to reflect project implementation needs (PAD, page 56). There was compliance with procurement management during implementation. The ICR (paragraph 79) notes that the Project Coordination Unit regularly updated the project procurement manual to improve performance during implementation. There were no reported cases of mis-procurement.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)



There was one unintended positive impact. The ICR (paragraph 59) notes that the network infrastructure was built along the railway roads of the Congo Public Train Company. The company in charge of civil works for the fiber optic infrastructure constructed several rural access roads along the site during construction and these roads were used by the rural population in the vicinity during implementation.

d. Other

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	
Bank Performance	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The ICR draws the following main lessons from the experience of implementing this project, with some modification of language.

- **Legal covenants or disbursement conditions need to be considered for critical elements of a project.** The PPP structure in this project was identified as a critical element for the effective and efficient operationalization of the regional network. Through the lifetime of this project, there were major issues with matters pertaining to establishing PPP for the regional network. Measures such as inclusion of PPP as a legal covenant or conditions for disbursement, could have helped in overcoming such challenges. The ICR (paragraph 87) notes that such disbursement conditions have been incorporated in the ongoing CAB projects in Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- **A careful consideration of political economy considerations is required at appraisal.** This project encountered serious implementation delays due to delays in counterpart funding. The experience of this project demonstrated that future projects could benefit from having contingency funds factored in project design.
- **Project implementation can be facilitated through strong stakeholder engagement.** This project required a significant amount of sensitization. The recruitment of a communications specialist in the Project Implementation Unit in this project helped in promoting the project across stakeholder groups. While stakeholder engagement early in the project was valuable, regular dialogue with the operators could have helped in identifying



regulatory and policy bottlenecks, and could have provided a better understanding for the failure of the PPP and potential alternatives.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR is reasonably well-written. It reports both outputs and outcomes of the project and its assessment is evidence-based. It is candid in acknowledging the difficulties associated with implementing the PPP, which undermined the regional dimensions of the program. It is also candid in addressing the issues that arose in the wake of delays in counterpart funding for the projects. The ICR follows the guidelines and draws reasonably good lessons from the experience of implementing this project.

The ICR would have benefitted with better editing. The main text of the ICR is 35 pages (more than twice the recommended length of 15 pages).

a. Quality of ICR Rating

Substantial