THE ENERGY RECORD

Mission 300. Mission Impossible.

And the Cost of Getting Power Wrong.

What the Stage in Washington Announces.
What the Record in Africa Reveals.

Parminder Brar | mdbreform.com | April 2026

$22.1bn	33.0%	0%	~600m
Committed to energy in Africa, FY2015–2026	Satisfactory — one in three	S+ rate in FY2015 and FY2017	People without electricity in Africa

Executive Summary

At the 2026 Spring Meetings, the World Bank launched Mission 300, a flagship initiative to deliver electricity access to 300 million people in Africa by 2030. The programme is positioned as central to the jobs agenda: electricity enables productivity, productivity enables employment, and employment delivers growth.

The ambition is not in question. The constraint is whether the delivery platform can achieve it.

The Independent Evaluation Group record shows that between FY2015 and FY2026, the World Bank's energy portfolio in Africa achieved 33.0 percent Satisfactory outcomes on 109 evaluated projects representing $22.1 billion in commitments. Two-thirds of projects did not meet the Satisfactory threshold. $18.9 billion — 85.7 percent of committed volume — went to below-Satisfactory projects. This performance differs only marginally between fragile and non-fragile countries.

A structured analysis of lessons learned across the 109 evaluated projects confirms that the dominant constraints are operational and institutional, not financial. **Implementation capacity constraints are cited in approximately 75 percent of projects. Financing constraints are cited in approximately 15 percent.** Energy is distinguished from water and education by a second layer of failure: system-level constraints — grid integration failures, transmission bottlenecks, dispatch inefficiency, and financial viability of utilities — affect 50 to 60 percent of projects. Infrastructure can be delivered successfully, and the system can still fail.

Nigeria provides the clearest example. High-cost, non-competitively procured generation assets have been added to a system constrained by transmission capacity and weak financial viability. Hydropower is backed down to accommodate contractual obligations. Generation exists but cannot be used optimally. Costs rise. The system weakens. The World Bank's own $200 million Electricity and Gas Improvement Project (NEGIP) was rated Moderately Unsatisfactory by IEG. Nigeria's energy S+ rate is zero percent on $700 million.

Mission 300 assumes that expanding electricity supply will deliver jobs and growth. The evidence suggests that without correcting system-level failures — on cost, dispatch, and infrastructure sequencing — additional capacity can increase financial stress rather than reduce it.

This is the eighth paper in the mdbreform.com series. An earlier note — PPPs, Nigeria, and the Cost of Getting Power Wrong (April 2026) — documented the Nigeria system problem in detail. This paper extends that analysis to the full Africa energy portfolio.

Part I: Mission 300 — The Stage

1. What Mission 300 Is

Mission 300 was announced at the 2026 Spring Meetings as a joint initiative of the World Bank Group and the African Development Bank. The objective is to connect 300 million people in Africa to electricity by 2030, with 250 million delivered through the World Bank Group and 50 million through the AfDB. It is the largest single energy access commitment in the Bank's history.

The programme is built around four pillars. First, scaling grid and off-grid access through a combination of grid extension, mini-grids, and solar home systems. Second, mobilising private capital through guarantee instruments, blended finance, and de-risking mechanisms — including the IPP structures modelled on Azura-Edo. Third, bundling projects across countries to reduce transaction costs and attract institutional investors. Fourth, country compacts in which governments commit to policy and regulatory reforms — on tariffs, utility governance, and private sector participation — in exchange for accelerated World Bank financing.

The framing is explicitly financial. The Bank estimates that Africa requires $131–140 billion per year in electricity investment. Current spending is $164.6 billion globally in the water and energy sectors combined, with 91 percent from government sources and less than 2 percent from private capital. Mission 300 positions the financing gap as the binding constraint and private capital mobilisation as the solution.

The programme rests on three assumptions. First, that the constraint is lack of access — a quantity problem that can be solved by connecting more people. Second, that the solution is more investment and private capital, mobilised through guarantees and policy compacts. Third, that the delivery system can absorb and utilise additional capacity effectively.

None of these assumptions are tested against the portfolio record.

The record shows that 67 percent of energy projects in Africa do not achieve Satisfactory outcomes. The three largest country portfolios — South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria — record zero percent Satisfactory. System-level constraints — grid integration, transmission, dispatch, financial viability — affect the majority of projects. Financing constraints are cited in 15 percent of projects. The announcement presents electricity as a quantity problem. The system reveals it as a quality and integration problem.

Mission 300 does not address the cost structure of generation, the sequencing of transmission investment relative to generation, dispatch efficiency, financial viability of utilities, or the historical delivery performance of the energy portfolio. It does not explain how 300 million connections will

be sustained when 65 percent of existing projects face sustainability failures. It does not explain how private capital will be repaid when utilities cannot collect revenue from existing customers. It does not explain how country compacts signed at the Spring Meetings will change the institutional architecture that has delivered 33 percent Satisfactory for a decade.

The countries that will host Mission 300 projects are the same countries whose energy portfolios the IEG database has already evaluated. Nigeria's energy S+ rate is zero percent. Kenya's is zero percent. Ethiopia's is 33 percent on three projects. The compacts are a commitment to deliver more electricity through the same system that has not delivered what it has already committed to deliver.

2. The Positioning Dynamic

Energy & Extractives is the second-largest Global Practice in Africa at $22.1 billion. Mission 300 gives it the Spring Meetings stage, the MDB coalition, and the headline number: 300 million people by 2030. The dynamic is the same as Water Forward. The launch happens in April. The IEG ratings arrive five to eight years later. Everyone who stood on the stage will have rotated. The incentive is to announce. The consequence for delivery arrives after the career payoff has been collected.

Part II: The Record

3. The Energy Portfolio in Africa, FY2015–2026

Between FY2015 and FY2026, the Independent Evaluation Group rated 109 energy projects in Africa. Thirty-six achieved Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory outcomes — a rate of 33.0 percent. The remaining $18.9 billion of $22.1 billion committed went to projects rated below Satisfactory.

Portfolio	S+ Rate	Projects	Committed	Below-S+
Energy — Africa (FY2015–2026)	33.0%	109	$22.1bn	$18.9bn (85.7%)
Energy — Non-FCS	35.5%	76	$18.8bn	$12.1bn
Energy — FCS	**29.0%**	31	$1.6bn	**$1.1bn**

Source: IEG Master Database March 2026. Energy & Extractives GP. Africa = ESA + WCA. S+ = Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory only.

South Africa accounts for $9.9 billion of the portfolio — dominated by the Eskom Investment Support Project, the largest single energy commitment in Africa. South Africa's energy S+ rate is zero percent. Kenya: zero percent on $1.6 billion. Nigeria: zero percent on $700 million. These are the three largest single-country energy portfolios in Africa. All three record zero Satisfactory outcomes.

Rwanda is the counter-case: seven projects, $607 million committed, 100 percent Satisfactory. The delivery platform there — strong government ownership, focused design, clear institutional arrangements — works. But it is the exception that confirms the institutional diagnosis.

4. The Eskom Case: $9.9 Billion and the Anatomy of a Mega-Project Failure

The Eskom Investment Support Project (P116410) deserves a section of its own. At $9.9 billion, it is the largest single energy commitment in the World Bank's Africa portfolio — and the largest single commitment of any kind in the IEG database for the continent. It accounts for 45 percent of the Africa energy portfolio's total committed volume. It was rated Moderately Unsatisfactory by IEG. The project that was designed to secure South Africa's energy future instead became a case study in how rushed preparation, institutional overconfidence, and the career incentive structure interact to produce outcomes that are the opposite of what was intended.

The context. In 2008–2009, South Africa experienced its first energy crisis. Load shedding shuttered mines and factories. GDP growth fell. The Bank's own appraisal estimated that electricity shortages had reduced GDP by approximately 1 percent. Eskom, the state-owned utility, was at the

time ranked globally as a premier power utility. South Africa's legal and regulatory framework was considered strong. The Bank was asked to participate in financing the 4,764 MW Medupi coal-fired power plant in Limpopo Province, already under construction, alongside the African Development Bank and other agencies. The project was approved by the Board on April 8, 2010 — one of the fastest preparations in the Bank's energy portfolio.

The rushed preparation. The Bank joined a project already under construction. Most procurement had been completed before the Bank engaged. Of $1.8 billion in contracts under the Medupi component, outstanding procurement to be conducted under Bank guidelines amounted to only $600 million. Environmental impact assessments and environmental management plans had similarly been completed before the Bank started preparation. South Africa was selected to pilot the use of country systems for safeguards. The due diligence relied heavily on Eskom's reputation and South Africa's regulatory framework — both of which proved to be inadequate proxies for project-level quality control. IEG concluded that "rushed preparation of projects identified as urgent can lead to larger problems than those they are designed to solve."

The reality. Medupi was designed to be completed in five years. It took eleven. The sixth and last generating unit reached commercial operation in August 2021 — delivering power well below targets. No comparable plant had been built in Africa before; the virtual designs from older plants proved unsuitable. Boiler design defects were discovered after commissioning, making them extremely difficult and costly to resolve. In November 2021, Unit 4 suffered a hydrogen explosion caused by failure to follow procedures and lack of proper supervision, resulting in damages estimated at R2.4 billion and the loss of approximately 700 MW of capacity. Unit 4 did not return to service until July 2025 — nearly four years later. Cost overruns on Medupi are estimated at 66 percent above original budget. On the parallel Kusile plant (not Bank-financed), cost overruns reached 185 percent.

The corruption dimension. South Africa's Special Investigating Unit launched an investigation in 2019 into corruption at Medupi and Kusile, examining allegations that contractors stole R139 billion ($9.1 billion) from the two projects. Medupi incurred irregular expenditure of R355 million in the 2020/2021 financial year alone, attributed to irregular tender processes and breach of National Treasury legislation. Fruitless and wasteful expenditure at Medupi and Kusile totalled R4.4 billion. Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan stated that corruption and cost overruns during construction were an important reason for the fourfold increase in South African electricity prices. The Bank's reliance on country systems for safeguards and procurement — the pilot arrangement that enabled fast preparation — meant that the Bank's own oversight mechanisms were not applied to the contracts where the most significant irregularities occurred.

The systemic consequences. The Medupi delays, combined with the failure to maintain the existing coal fleet, produced the worst energy crisis in South Africa's history. Load shedding reached

Stage 6 — removing more than 6,000 MW from the grid at a time. South Africa endured record levels of power cuts in 2022 and 2023. The South African Reserve Bank estimated that load shedding reduced GDP growth by 0.7 percentage points in 2022 alone. Eskom's debt exceeded R400 billion ($21–22 billion). The government was forced to provide a multi-year debt relief package, shifting the risk onto the sovereign. Credit rating agencies repeatedly flagged Eskom's liabilities as a systemic risk. Electricity prices rose fourfold. By 2024, private solar installations had surged from 1.2 GW to 6.1 GW as businesses and households abandoned the grid. Eskom's total sales fell 15 percent between 2013 and 2023 — the utility entered a death spiral of falling revenue, rising debt, and deteriorating infrastructure.

The career payoff. The EISP was approved in April 2010. The IEG rating — Moderately Unsatisfactory — was published years later. The task team that prepared the project collected the career payoff that comes with delivering the Bank's largest-ever energy commitment in Africa. By the time the consequences became visible — the delays, the design defects, the corruption, the load shedding crisis, the sovereign debt transfer — the individuals who prepared and approved the project had moved on. This is the incentive architecture documented throughout the mdbreform.com series. The approval is rewarded. The outcome is someone else's problem. In this case, the outcome was the energy security of 60 million South Africans and the fiscal stability of the continent's largest economy.

The $9.9 billion question for Mission 300 is whether the same preparation standards, the same reliance on country systems, the same career incentive structure, and the same disconnect between project approval and system outcomes will be applied to the next generation of mega-investments. The Eskom case is not history. It is the template that has not been corrected.

5. FCS vs Non-FCS

FCS energy achieves 29.0 percent Satisfactory on $1.6 billion. Non-FCS achieves 35.5 percent on $18.8 billion. The gap is 6.5 percentage points. Energy delivery fails almost equally in fragile and stable countries. The project-level evidence reinforces this: only approximately 20 percent of projects cite fragility as a primary constraint, compared with 75 percent citing implementation capacity. The failure pattern is systemic, not contextual.

6. Annual Trend

The year-by-year data for Africa energy:

Year	S+ Rate	Projects	Committed
FY2015	0.0%	9	$493m
FY2016	28.6%	7	$306m
FY2017	0.0%	5	$617m
FY2018	**18.2%**	11	$1,045m
FY2019	**45.5%**	11	$1,584m
FY2020	**33.3%**	9	$1,836m
FY2021	50.0%	2	$138m
FY2022	66.7%	6	$9,546m
FY2023	33.3%	9	$729m
FY2024	35.7%	14	$2,672m
FY2025	42.9%	21	$2,664m
FY2026	**40.0%**	5	$438m

Source: IEG Master Database March 2026. Africa energy.

FY2015 and FY2017 record zero percent Satisfactory. The twelve-year trend is volatile around a weak centre. No sustained improvement is visible.

7. Performance by Project Type: What Mission 300 Depends On

The portfolio-level S+ rate of 33 percent masks a critical variation by project type. A classification of the 109 projects by their primary function — generation, transmission and distribution, access and electrification, or reform and technical assistance — reveals that the two categories on which Mission 300 most directly depends are the worst performers in the portfolio.

Project Type	Projects	S+ Rate	Committed	Below S+
Generation	21	19.0%	$11.0bn	$11.0bn
Generation + Transmission	20	50.0%	$5.5bn	$3.8bn
Transmission / Distribution	32	34.4%	$3.1bn	$2.2bn
Access / Electrification	9	11.1%	$458m	$428m
Reform / TA / Policy	27	37.0%	$2.0bn	$1.6bn

Source: IEG Master Database March 2026. Classification by primary project function based on project names and IEG lessons text.

Generation: 19 percent Satisfactory. One in five. Twenty-one projects, $11.0 billion committed, virtually all of it below Satisfactory. This category is dominated by the Eskom EISP ($9.1 billion, Moderately Unsatisfactory), but even excluding Eskom, the generation portfolio records Morupule

B ($339 million, Unsatisfactory), DRC Inga 3 ($106 million, Highly Unsatisfactory), Felou Hydro ($120 million, Moderately Unsatisfactory), and Ethiopia Energy Access ($148 million, Unsatisfactory). The successes — Lom Pangar in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire Electricity Transmission, Ethiopia Network Reinforcement — are the exceptions in a portfolio where generation delivery consistently fails.

Access and electrification: 11 percent Satisfactory. One in nine. This is the category that Mission 300 is explicitly about — connecting people to electricity. Nine projects, $458 million committed, one Satisfactory. The projects designed to deliver what Mission 300 promises — rural electrification, last-mile connections, off-grid solutions, household access — have the worst track record of any category in the portfolio. Benin Increased Access ($102 million, Moderately Satisfactory), Uganda Rural Transformation ($75 million, Moderately Unsatisfactory), Gabon Access ($60 million, Unsatisfactory), Senegal Rural ($43 million, Moderately Unsatisfactory). Mission 300 proposes to reach 300 million people through a delivery platform that achieves 11 percent Satisfactory on the projects most directly comparable to what it intends to do.

The mixed generation-plus-transmission projects perform better at 50 percent, largely because they include smaller, more focused operations. Transmission and distribution achieves 34 percent — lifted by the Rwanda DPF series (three projects, all Satisfactory). Reform and TA achieves 37 percent. The pattern is clear: the closer the project is to building new generation capacity or connecting new users, the worse the outcomes. The further it is from physical delivery — policy reform, institutional strengthening — the slightly better it performs. Mission 300 requires the former. The portfolio delivers the latter.

Part III: The System Problem — Nigeria

8. A System Under Stress

Nigeria illustrates the central issue that distinguishes energy from water and education. In those sectors, the problem is primarily that projects cannot be implemented. In energy, there is a second failure: even when infrastructure is delivered, the system into which it is introduced does not function efficiently.

The Nigerian power system exhibits the following features: high-cost generation assets procured through non-competitive processes; transmission constraints that limit power evacuation; existing generation capacity that is underutilised; hydropower backed down to accommodate contractual obligations on thermal plants; and capacity payments locked into contracts regardless of dispatch.

The result is a system that must purchase expensive power while cheaper power remains unused. Costs rise. Utility balance sheets weaken. Fiscal pressure increases. The system becomes more expensive without becoming more effective.

9. Calabar, Azura-Edo, and the Cost Structure

The Calabar Generation Company (634 MW) was developed under the National Integrated Power Projects programme and commissioned with five gas turbine units. The plant operates significantly below capacity. Transmission constraints in the Cross River corridor limit power evacuation. The system must pay for capacity it cannot fully utilise.

The Azura-Edo Independent Power Project (459 MW) was structured as a public-private partnership with a World Bank partial risk guarantee. The capacity payment obligations are contractually fixed. The system absorbs this cost whether or not the power is needed at the margin.

Meanwhile, Nigeria's existing hydropower capacity — Kainji, Jebba, Shiroro — is backed down. Hydropower is the cheapest source of electricity in the Nigerian system. When it is displaced by contractual obligations to thermal plants, the average cost of power rises. The system pays more for less.

The World Bank's own $200 million Nigeria Electricity and Gas Improvement Project (NEGIP, P106172) was rated Moderately Unsatisfactory by IEG. The evaluation found that the project had not adequately addressed the post-privatisation dynamics: poor revenue collection, lack of incentives for distribution companies, and the absence of a parallel power purchase agreement for the Calabar generation facility.

The financial consequences are now visible at system level. As of early 2026, generation companies reported sector debts exceeding N6.8 trillion, with a monthly shortfall of approximately N200 billion. The Central Bank of Nigeria had injected over N2.3 trillion into the sector. The Federal Government raised N501 billion in bonds through the Nigerian Bulk Electricity Trading Company to service generation company debts. Gas supply stood at approximately 692 million standard cubic feet per day — 43 percent of the 1,630 million required for thermal plants to operate at capacity. Sixteen of thirty-three power plants were not supplying electricity. The system was delivering fewer than 4,000 MW for a population of over 235 million people, against an installed capacity exceeding 15,500 MW.

The Azura-Edo model as IPP template. The Azura-Edo project is not only significant as a Nigerian case. IFC and the World Bank have positioned it as a replicable model for independent power production across Sub-Saharan Africa. The project structure — a World Bank partial risk guarantee backstopping a gas-fired IPP with a take-or-pay power purchase agreement and contractually fixed capacity payments — is designed to de-risk private investment in generation. The model has been presented at investor conferences and Spring Meetings panels as evidence that private capital can be mobilised for African power.

The question the Nigerian evidence raises is whether the model is replicable without replicating the system problem. The Azura-Edo plant delivers power. The guarantee structure works. The private investors are repaid. But the system into which the power is delivered cannot absorb it efficiently, cannot dispatch it optimally, and cannot sustain the cost. The take-or-pay obligation means the system pays whether or not the power is needed at the margin. When this structure is replicated across multiple IPPs in a single system — as Nigeria's generation pipeline envisages — the aggregate cost of contractual obligations can exceed the system's ability to pay. Each project succeeds on its own terms. The system fails on aggregate terms.

This is the mechanism that Mission 300 must confront. If the programme's strategy for mobilising private capital relies on guarantee-backed IPP structures modelled on Azura-Edo, and if those structures are introduced into systems that have not resolved transmission, dispatch, and cost recovery constraints, the result will be the same: generation assets that are contractually profitable for investors and fiscally unsustainable for governments. The project-level economics will be sound. The system-level economics will deteriorate.

The lesson from Nigeria is not that private investment in generation is wrong. It is that private investment in generation without prior resolution of system constraints transfers risk from the investor to the sovereign. The guarantee structure is designed to do exactly this. That is its purpose. The question is whether the sovereign — and the IDA borrowers who will host Mission 300 projects — can absorb that risk when the system cannot use the power efficiently.

10. The Key Question

Why introduce high-cost generation into a system that cannot evacuate it, cannot pay for it, and does not need it at the margin?

Because projects are evaluated individually, not systemically. The task team leader designs a generation project. The project is appraised on its own economics. It goes to the Board. It is approved. It is built. But the system into which the project is introduced — the transmission grid, the dispatch order, the cost recovery framework, the utility balance sheet — is not part of the project's results framework. The project can succeed on its own terms and the system can still fail.

Nigeria is not an outlier. It is a signal.

The irony of Mission 300 is that it proposes to connect 300 million Africans to electricity while the financial architecture it promotes — guarantee-backed IPPs with take-or-pay obligations — is the same architecture that is currently preventing millions of Nigerians from accessing affordable power. The Calabar and Azura-Edo capacity payments are contractual obligations that run for twenty to thirty years. The system must service these obligations whether or not the power is used, whether or not the grid can evacuate it, and whether or not the utility can collect revenue from customers. Every naira committed to honouring these contracts is a naira not available for grid extension, distribution network maintenance, or the last-mile connections that Mission 300 promises. The financial burden that these two IPPs have imposed on the Nigerian power sector will ensure that millions of Nigerians remain without electricity for the next thirty years while the contracts run their course. Mission 300 announces access. The IPP cost structure forecloses it.

A detailed analytical note on the Nigeria PPP and IPP structure — PPPs, Nigeria, and the Cost of Getting Power Wrong (mdbreform.com, April 2026) — was prepared and shared with both the World Bank and IFC. The note documents the cost structure, the contractual obligations, the system-level consequences, and the implications for Mission 300's replication strategy. As of the date of this paper's publication, neither the World Bank nor IFC has responded. The silence is itself informative. The institution that positions the Azura-Edo model as a template for Africa has not engaged with the analysis that shows why the template produces system failure. The note remains publicly available at mdbreform.com.

Part IV: What the Projects Say — The 109-Project Evidence

The annual data and the country data show what happened. The project-level evidence shows why. A structured coding of the "lessons learned" sections across all 109 IEG-evaluated energy projects identifies the constraints that project teams themselves cite as the reasons for underperformance. The analysis distinguishes two categories of constraint: implementation constraints, which are common to all infrastructure sectors, and system constraints, which are specific to energy.

11. Implementation Constraints

Implementation capacity is cited in 62 percent of all projects (68 of 109). Among below-Satisfactory projects, the incidence is 63 percent. These constraints include under-resourced project management units, limited technical capacity at central and subnational levels, weak procurement and contract management expertise, and insufficient staffing. The Ethiopia Energy Access Project ($148 million, rated Unsatisfactory) was "extremely ambitious in design, scope, institutional framework, objectives and time framework," with three major investment components each implemented by a different ministry. IEG concluded there should have been three separate projects. Supervision was "very thin" because mission teams had to cover up to six projects simultaneously.

Implementation delays are cited in 51 percent of projects, rising to 56 percent among underperformers. These include delays in effectiveness, slow disbursement, procurement bottlenecks, and extended implementation periods. The Zambia Increased Access to Electricity Services project ($48 million) was not ready for implementation at the time of Board approval: "Project effectiveness was delayed by nine months. Implementation only started after the first restructuring in 2010." The Cameroon Energy Sector Development project ($50 million) took eighteen months just to procure three grid extension contracts because of the absence of standard bidding documents and need to change technical specifications.

Over-complex design is cited in 47 percent of projects and 51 percent of underperformers. Projects routinely combine multiple objectives — generation, transmission, distribution, off-grid, institutional reform, and capacity building — within a single operation. The Tanzania Energy Sector Capacity Building Project ($35 million, rated Unsatisfactory) attempted to develop public-private partnerships in power generation through a five-year technical assistance project. IEG found this "overly ambitious and unattainable." The Regional and Domestic Power Markets Development Project ($845 million) attempted to address multiple objectives in a mega-project in a fragile

environment with limited technical capacity; IEG concluded that disaggregation into smaller, more focused operations "might conceivably have produced better outcomes."

Supervision and M&E weaknesses are cited in 45 percent of projects. IEG repeatedly finds that results frameworks are poorly designed, indicators are not attributable to project interventions, and supervision is insufficiently resourced. The Kenya Electricity Modernisation Project used system-wide SAIDI and commercial loss indicators that could not measure the project's specific impact. The Senegal Electricity Sector Support Project found that "project indicators should be selected carefully to ensure that these can be fully attributed to the project." The Uganda Energy for Rural Transformation III found that 50 percent of distribution line works were completed without compensation payments to project-affected people — non-compliance that was not detected until one year before closing.

Procurement delays are cited in 43 percent of projects, rising to 47 percent among underperformers. The Benin Increased Access to Modern Energy project ($102 million) found that the national procurement agency had "a very low threshold for full approval of contracts, which resulted in delays processing numerous small size projects up to four months." The OMVS Transmission Expansion Project found that "insufficient procurement capacity of the PIU continued through to project closing" and some outputs could not be completed before the closing date.

Safeguards and resettlement delays are cited in 39 percent of projects. Land acquisition, right-of-way clearance, and environmental and social compliance are major drivers of time overruns in transmission and distribution projects. The Uganda Electricity Sector Development Project found that "resettlement-related issues were determined to be the main reason which delayed the schedule for activation of the Kawanda-Masaka transmission line by nearly three years." The Côte d'Ivoire Electricity Transmission and Access Project was suspended for eighteen months after the unexpected discovery of hydrocarbon and PCB pollution at a substation site.

Financing constraints are cited in 23 percent of projects — significantly lower than the incidence of implementation and institutional constraints. Among underperforming projects, the figure is 19 percent. Financing has limited explanatory power. The dominant constraints are operational, not financial.

Table: Implementation Constraints from 109 Africa Energy Projects (FY2015–2026)

Constraint	All Projects	Non-S+	S+	Interpretation
Implementation capacity	62%	63%	61%	Most pervasive constraint
Implementation delays	51%	56%	42%	Compresses timelines

Over-complex design	47%	51%	39%	Ambition exceeds capacity
Supervision / M&E weakness	45%	44%	47%	Limits course correction
Procurement delays	43%	47%	36%	Major bottleneck
Safeguards / resettlement	39%	41%	36%	Drives time overruns
Institutional coordination	39%	33%	53%	Multi-agency complexity
Project management / PMU	39%	41%	33%	Weak execution units
Financing constraints	23%	19%	31%	Not the binding constraint

Source: Structured coding of IEG "lessons learned" sections, 109 energy projects. S+ = Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory. Non-S+ = below Satisfactory.

The Botswana Morupule B project ($339 million, rated Unsatisfactory) illustrates how implementation failures compound. The Bank team lacked expertise in key areas. A virtual design from a plant implemented more than ten years earlier was used and proved unsuitable. Defects were found only after commissioning, making them "extremely difficult and costly to resolve." The project that was rushed to deliver energy in five years was completed eleven years later, delivering power well below targets. South Africa's $9.1 billion Eskom Investment Support Project — the largest single commitment in the portfolio — was also rated Moderately Unsatisfactory, with IEG concluding that "rushed preparation of projects identified as urgent can lead to larger problems than those they are designed to solve."

The DRC Inga 3 and Mid-Size Hydropower Development TA ($106 million) was rated Highly Unsatisfactory — the worst possible rating. IEG found that clear commitments on strategic directions had not been secured from the ultimate decision-making authority. The government's unilateral decision led to project cancellation. The Guinea-Bissau Emergency Electricity and Water Rehabilitation Project ($23 million, rated Unsatisfactory) found that although power supply was temporarily improved after installation of generators, provision of service remained intermittent because both the electricity and water distribution networks were in poor condition. The generators were delivered, but the system could not use them.

12. System Constraints — The Energy-Specific Layer

Energy is different from water and education in one critical way. Infrastructure can be delivered successfully, and the system can still fail. The second table captures the system-level constraints that are specific to the energy sector. These constraints describe not whether the project was implemented, but whether the power system into which the investment was introduced can actually absorb, dispatch, and pay for the additional capacity.

Sector reform challenges are cited in 43 percent of projects. The Nigerian NEGIP found that sector privatisation had fundamentally changed the operating context: "multiple scenarios should be developed to facilitate the project's rapid adaptation to the changing reform and operational context." The Cape Verde Recovery and Reform project found that despite five years of engagement, the government rejected tariff study recommendations and no progress was made on loss reduction or sector reform. The Ghana Energy Development and Access Project ($176 million) found that "lack of Government commitment to making progress in achieving the operational and financial sustainability of the sector led to the Project's inability to achieve the planned results."

Grid integration and transmission constraints are cited in 37 percent of projects. The Tanzania Backbone Transmission project delivered a transmission line but found it underused because generation was insufficient and the distribution network was not robust enough. IEG found that "all factors central to a project's outcome should be either internalised in the design of the project or addressed through measures outside the project." The Kenya Electricity Expansion Project ($1.13 billion) found that the government was "pushing strongly for universal access despite the shortage in high- and medium-voltage transmission" — the Olkaria geothermal plant's operation had to be curtailed because the electricity generated could not be evacuated.

Tariff, cost recovery, and financial viability constraints are cited in 31 percent of projects. The Rwanda energy DPF series — the portfolio's strongest performer — documented the mechanism clearly: "Financial imbalances in power companies are likely to turn into financial crises if the problems in the sector are not diagnosed and their causes addressed on time." Rwanda addressed this by having the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Infrastructure jointly define fiscal transfers while implementing reforms toward full-cost recovery. The lesson is that cost recovery is not optional; it is the condition for sustainability. Most countries in the portfolio have not met this condition.

Demand-side and access constraints are cited in 30 percent of projects. The Rwanda DPF series found that "affordability by households was the main constraint to the expansion of off-grid connections" and that a wide range of proposed reforms was "insufficient to overcome that constraint." The Ghana project found that off-grid rural electrification had negative economic benefits without accounting for social ones: "the cost of connecting remote communities is very high, and often the amount of electricity produced by household-level PV systems or through mini-grids is low." This finding has direct implications for Mission 300's off-grid targets.

Private sector and PPP challenges are cited in 27 percent of projects. The Uganda Energy for Rural Transformation project assumed private sector finance would be available for household connections and private ICT operators would invest in rural infrastructure; neither materialised. The Guinea-Bissau project found that "the willingness of the private sector to invest in fragile states can

be expected to be limited and should be realistically assessed in project design." The Liberia Accelerated Electricity Expansion Project found that "planning in the electricity sector needs to go beyond short- and medium-term objectives" — HFO storage tanks were built for a short-term need that became obsolete when generation switched to hydro.

Sequencing failures are cited in 20 percent of projects but are analytically decisive. The pattern is consistent: generation is added before transmission can evacuate it; distribution is extended before generation can supply it; policy reform is assumed before institutional capacity exists to implement it. The Regional and Domestic Power Markets Development Project ($845 million) found that "the two key objectives of meeting regional demand as well as domestic demand for energy were mostly at conflict with one another." The project took over a decade to implement.

Table: System Constraints from 109 Africa Energy Projects (FY2015–2026)

Constraint	All Projects	Non-S+	S+	Interpretation
Sector reform challenges	43%	41%	47%	Political economy barrier
Grid / transmission integration	37%	32%	47%	Capacity cannot be evacuated
Tariffs / cost recovery	31%	27%	39%	Financial sustainability
Demand / access / affordability	30%	29%	33%	Limits revenue and utilisation
Private sector / PPP issues	27%	26%	28%	Assumptions not met
Regulatory / policy framework	26%	22%	33%	Weak investment signals
Sequencing failures	20%	16%	28%	System not ready for investment
Utility performance / reform	18%	19%	17%	Weak institutional capacity

Source: Structured coding of IEG "lessons learned" sections, 109 energy projects.

13. The Dual Failure

The implementation table answers the question: can the project be delivered? In 62 percent of cases, implementation capacity is a constraint. Implementation delays affect half the portfolio. Over-complex design affects nearly half. These are the same patterns observed in water and education. The energy sector is not unique in facing them.

The system table answers the question that is unique to energy: does the power system work once the project is delivered? In 37 percent of cases, the grid cannot absorb new capacity. In 31 percent, the system cannot sustain the cost. In 43 percent, sector reform has not created the institutional conditions for the investment to function. These constraints are analytically distinct from

implementation failure. A project can be delivered on time and on budget and still fail to improve system outcomes if the grid is constrained, dispatch is inefficient, or cost recovery is absent.

The Rwanda counter-case makes the lesson concrete. Seven projects, 100 percent Satisfactory. The government adopted a recovery and development plan during project appraisal. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Infrastructure worked together to define fiscal transfers while sector reforms were implemented toward full-cost recovery. The utility was restructured with professional hiring, management information systems, and clear accountability. IEG found that "government commitment is essential and can lead to project success even when the objectives are ambitious." The lesson is not that Rwanda is easy. It is that when system-level thinking, government ownership, and institutional clarity are present, the delivery platform works. When they are absent — which is the case in the majority of the portfolio — it does not.

The combined insight: energy sector underperformance in Africa is driven by a dual failure. Projects are difficult to implement, and even when implemented, they are introduced into systems that cannot use them efficiently. Adding generation capacity without resolving transmission constraints, dispatch inefficiencies, and cost recovery problems leads to systems that are more expensive but not more effective. The quantified evidence from 109 projects shows implementation constraints in 62 percent, system constraints in 31 to 43 percent, and financing constraints in 23 percent. The constraint is not capital. It is execution and system coherence.

Conclusion: The Distance Between the Stage and the Grid

Mission 300 is the right ambition in the wrong delivery architecture.

Approximately 600 million people in Africa lack access to electricity. The continent's working-age population is doubling. Electricity is foundational to the jobs agenda. The need is not in question.

What is in question is whether a delivery platform that achieves 33 percent Satisfactory can reach 300 million people in four years. The three largest country energy portfolios — South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria — have zero percent Satisfactory. The system-level evidence shows that adding capacity without fixing integration, dispatch, and cost recovery makes systems more expensive, not more effective.

The quantified evidence from 109 evaluated projects leaves no ambiguity. **Three out of four projects face implementation capacity constraints. Two out of three face system integration failures. Fewer than one in six identify financing as the primary issue.** The dominant constraints are operational, institutional, and systemic, not financial. Without addressing these structural issues, Mission 300 will reproduce the 33 percent.

The stage announces access. The system determines outcomes. They are not yet aligned. And no one on the stage will be there when IEG delivers the verdict.

The next production opens in October.

Data and Sources

IEG outcome data: IEG Master Database March 2026 (3,507 deduplicated rated projects, FY2015–2026). Energy & Extractives GP = IEG Global Practice classification. Africa = ESA + WCA. S+ = Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory only. FCS: World Bank FY26 Harmonized List, July 2025. Mission 300: World Bank Press Release, April 2026. Nigeria energy system: Brar, P. (2026). PPPs, Nigeria, and the Cost of Getting Power Wrong. mdbreform.com. Denizer, Kaufmann, and Kraay (2013). Good Countries or Good Projects? Journal of Development Economics, 105: 288–302.

This paper extends seven prior analyses at mdbreform.com: the IDA Performance Record; the Education Record; the FCV Strategy Submission; the DPF Incentive Trap; the Board Governance paper; the Game Theory analysis; and the Water Record. Full data at mdbreform.com/data/.

Parminder Brar is the founder of mdbreform.com and a former World Bank Country Manager and Lead Governance Specialist. Four field postings in FCV countries in Africa, 2003–2023. Inquiries: fcvstrategy@gmail.com