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The Zero Club (Part 11)

Transport in Africa: 7 Countries. 19 Projects. $1.65 Billion. Zero Satisfactory.

Seven countries where World Bank transport projects never achieved a Satisfactory IEG outcome rating.

Transport · Sub-Saharan Africa · IEG Database March 2026

The Africa transport portfolio: $10.1bn committed in the 2010s. S+ rate: 2.4%.

100% Investment Project Financing. No DPFs. No PforR.
The right instrument. The wrong outcomes.

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7
Zero Club countries. DRC, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Lesotho, South Sudan, Guinea, Niger.

19
Transport investment projects evaluated by IEG. Not one rated Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory.

$1.65bn
committed to Zero Club countries. 8% of Africa Transport commitment. Zero percent S+.

2.4%
S+ by commitment, 2010s — $10.1bn committed. The decade Africa built roads that did not hold.

Executive Summary

The record. The World Bank's Transport Global Practice committed $20.6 billion across 143 IEG-evaluated projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. The S+ rate by commitment is 24.9 percent. In seven countries, the rate is zero: 19 projects, $1.65 billion committed, not one rated Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory by IEG. This is the Transport Zero Club.

The instrument test. The Health Zero Club (Part 10) showed that IPFs — investment projects with procurement, results frameworks, and supervision — fail at 0% S+ in 14 African countries. The Transport Zero Club confirms the finding in a different sector. Every project in the Transport Zero Club is an IPF. There are no DPFs, no PforR operations. The portfolio uses the Bank's most operationally intensive instrument — roads, bridges, railways, procurement of physical assets, site supervision, contractor management. It produces 2.4 percent S+ by commitment in the decade when the Bank scaled transport investment most aggressively. The problem is not the instrument.

The decade collapse. The 2010s: 58 projects, $10.1 billion, 2.4 percent S+ by commitment. The 2000s: 55.8 percent S+ by count. In one decade, transport performance fell from among the Bank's strongest sectors to its worst. The same decade when the Bank launched its most ambitious transport strategies, the projects that were supposed to implement them delivered at 2.4 cents on the dollar.

The four-year zero. Between FY2019 and FY2022, the Africa transport portfolio recorded zero Satisfactory outcomes across 17 projects and $5.1 billion. Not one road, bridge, rail, or transit project achieved its development objectives across an entire IDA replenishment cycle. No other sector in Africa has recorded four consecutive years of zero Satisfactory outcomes.

The FCS inversion. Non-fragile countries achieve only 8.2 percent S+ by count in transport — worse than fragile and conflict-affected states at 18.8 percent. The Bank builds roads worse in stable countries, where institutional capacity, procurement systems, and contractor markets should be stronger. The binding constraint is not fragility. It is the delivery model.

The cross-sector overlap. DRC appears in the Health Zero Club, the MTI Zero Club, and the Transport Zero Club — three sectors, $3.6 billion, zero Satisfactory in each. Lesotho appears in all three. The same institutional environment that prevents MTI conditionality from producing reform and health projects from delivering services also prevents roads from reaching Satisfactory. The evidence points toward a country-level institutional constraint that no single GP design choice can overcome.

The connective tissue. Transport is not one sector. It is the foundation of every other sector initiative the Bank is scaling in Africa. AgriConnect needs roads to get crops to market. Health Works needs connectivity to staff clinics. Mission 300 needs logistics infrastructure to maintain energy grids. The Transport Record (mdbreform.com/transport-record/, April 2026) documents that the Bank's May 2025 report found 37 percent of food lost in transit, transport adds up to 30 percent to final food costs, and 58 percent of Africans are food insecure. The Bank publishes the diagnosis while its transport portfolio delivers at 4 cents on the dollar in the most recent decade.

Case Selection and Methodology

Scope. This paper examines all 143 IEG-evaluated Transport projects in Sub-Saharan Africa from the IEG ICRR/PPAR master database (March 2026). Country-level analysis excludes multi-country regional projects. Commitment-weighted analysis is used throughout.

Why S+ and not MS+. Methodology is identical to Parts 9 (MTI) and 10 (Health). Satisfactory is the standard IFC and MIGA use. IDA corporate reporting normalised MS+ as its headline metric — encompassing projects that have not achieved their objectives satisfactorily. The 2010s transport portfolio: 6.9 percent S+ by project count. MS+: approximately 75 percent. The gap between those numbers is the space in which $10 billion in delivery failure is rendered invisible.

Sample selection. A minimum of two evaluated projects was required to confirm the pattern is systemic rather than project-specific. Under this threshold, six single-project countries also returned zero Satisfactory: Botswana ($186M, MS), Togo ($56M, MS), Central African Republic ($45M, MU), Sudan ($44M, MS), Guinea-Bissau ($40M, MS), and Zimbabwe ($20M, MS). Including them would raise the total to 13 countries where the Bank has never achieved a Satisfactory transport outcome in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Why Transport. Transport is selected as Part 11 because: (a) it is the lowest-performing GP in Africa by recent commitment-weighted S+ rate (4.1% FY2015–2026); (b) it is 100% IPF, providing the cleanest possible test of the investment project instrument; (c) it shows the most dramatic decade collapse of any sector; and (d) its cross-sector overlap with the Health and MTI Zero Clubs provides the strongest institutional environment evidence in the series.

Limitations. IEG ratings measure project delivery against stated objectives. Transport projects face inherent attribution challenges — road quality is affected by maintenance funding, climate events, and contractor performance after project close. The paper does not claim these projects produced no infrastructure. The significance is that across 19 evaluated projects in 7 countries over up to 34 years, none crossed IEG's threshold for having satisfactorily achieved its stated objectives.

1. The Aggregate Record: Transport in Africa

Transport committed $20.6 billion across 143 IEG-evaluated projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. The S+ rate by commitment is 24.9 percent. The decade trajectory tells the story — and it is unlike any other GP in the series:

Decade	Projects	Committed	S+ (count)	S+ (commit)
1990s (closing)	14	$1,689M	64.3%	32.3%
2000s (closing)	52	$6,478M	55.8%	65.6%
2010s (closing)	58	$10,094M	6.9%	2.4%
2020s (closing)	19	$2,326M	10.5%	3.9%

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026. By project closing FY. Country-level projects only.

The 2000s peak — 65.6 percent S+ by commitment — reflects a period when transport projects were primarily road rehabilitation in post-conflict states (DRC, Sierra Leone, Liberia) that were rated against modest post-conflict benchmarks. The 2010s collapse to 2.4 percent is the defining feature: the decade when the Bank launched its most ambitious regional transport strategies produced the worst outcomes in the sector's history. The 2020s partial recovery to 3.9 percent by commitment is not meaningful — it reflects two S-rated projects averaging $35M against a large base of ongoing failures.

The four-year zero. Between FY2019 and FY2022, 17 transport projects totalling $5.1 billion closed with zero Satisfactory outcomes. The projects include: Ethiopia Transport Systems Improvement ($300M, MU), Nigeria Rural Access and Mobility Phase 2 ($230M, MU), Southern Africa Trade and Transport Facilitation ($213M, MU), CEMAC Transport-Transit Facilitation ($201M, U), Tanzania DMDP ($300M, MU), Kenya Road Sector Investment ($300M, U), and Ghana Transport Sector ($225M, MU). An entire IDA replenishment cycle. Zero.

The FCS inversion. Non-FCS countries achieve 8.2 percent S+ by count. FCS countries achieve 18.8 percent. The Bank builds roads worse in stable countries than in conflict-affected ones. This is the opposite of what capacity theory predicts. It suggests the binding constraint in non-FCS countries is not fragility but the Bank's project design model — which scales complexity, disbursement volumes, and ambition beyond what even stable institutional environments can absorb.

GP Comparison

Transport's all-time S+ rate of 24.9 percent by commitment places it among the weakest-performing GPs. The recent-decade (FY2015–2026) figure of 4.1 percent is the lowest of any major GP in Africa:

Global Practice	Projects	Committed	S+ (all-time commit)
Social Protection & Jobs	146	$16.9bn	52.4%
Urban, Resilience and Land	234	$14.3bn	41.6%
Governance	176	$9.2bn	38.8%
Agriculture and Food	193	$11.4bn	32.9%
Water	104	$9.0bn	33.9%
Education	215	$13.2bn	22.6%

Global Practice	Projects	Committed	S+ (all-time commit)
Health, Nutrition & Population	207	$14.9bn	25.1%
MTI	375	$37.4bn	24.6%
Transport	143	$20.6bn	24.9%
Energy & Extractives	175	$25.2bn	15.9%

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026. Commitment-weighted. Sub-Saharan Africa only. These comparisons are descriptive and do not control for country difficulty, fragility, or project complexity.

THE DECADE QUESTION

In the decade when the Bank scaled transport investment most aggressively — $10.1 billion in projects closing in the 2010s — Transport delivered Satisfactory outcomes on 2.4 percent of committed resources. Four consecutive years of zero Satisfactory. The same decade, MTI delivered 3 percent. Both GPs, both managing the Bank's largest Africa portfolios, failed at rates that are not marginal underperformance. They are an order-of-magnitude gap from every other sector.

2. The Zero Club

In seven African countries, Transport has never delivered a Satisfactory outcome. These countries account for 8 percent of all Africa Transport commitment:

Country	Projects	Committed	Period	Rating Distribution
DRC	4	$948M	FY2003–2022	3 MS, 1 HU
Sierra Leone	3	$172M	FY1993–2014	2 MS, 1 MU
Burundi	3	$141M	FY1990–2019	1 MS, 2 MU
Lesotho	3	$131M	FY1996–2024	3 MS
South Sudan	2	$130M	FY2006–2017	2 MS
Guinea	2	$70M	FY2005–2024	1 MU, 1 U
Niger	2	$58M	FY1998–2016	1 MS, 1 MU

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026. Countries with ≥2 Transport projects evaluated. Zero S+ by commitment.

The Zero Club is relatively small in the Transport sector compared to Health (14 countries) and MTI (14 countries). This is because the Transport sector's failures are distributed more broadly — 12 countries reported zero Satisfactory in the FY2015–2026 period per the Transport Record, including Kenya ($1.4bn), Ethiopia ($1.2bn), Nigeria ($918M), Tanzania ($490M), and Ghana ($404M). The all-time Zero Club (7 countries) excludes these larger borrowers because they have at least one S-rated project somewhere in their historical record. But the recent record is uniformly weak: the Bank's largest transport borrowers on the continent have not achieved Satisfactory since the 2000s.

The rating distribution across the 19 Zero Club projects: 12 Moderately Satisfactory (63%), 5 Moderately Unsatisfactory (26%), 1 Unsatisfactory (5%), 1 Highly Unsatisfactory (5%). The modal rating is again MS — partial achievement. This is the most MS-heavy Zero Club in the series, reflecting transport's particular vulnerability to the MS equilibrium: roads get built, bridges get constructed, but maintenance systems, institutional capacity, and sustainability objectives are not achieved.

3. The Cross-Sector Overlap: Institutions, Not Instruments

The Transport Zero Club's most analytically significant finding is not the seven-country list. It is the overlap with the Health and MTI Zero Clubs. Five countries appear in two or three Zero Club lists simultaneously:

Country	Health ZC	MTI ZC	Transport ZC	Finding
DRC	HEALTH ZC ($982M)	MTI ZC ($1.7bn)	TRANSPORT ZC ($948M)	Three sectors. $3.6bn. 0% S+ in each.
Lesotho	HEALTH ZC ($74M)	MTI ZC ($87M)	TRANSPORT ZC ($131M)	Across 22 years, 13 projects in three sectors. Not one Satisfactory.
Sierra Leone	HEALTH ZC ($140M)	—	TRANSPORT ZC ($172M)	Both investment sectors. Combined $312M. Zero S+.
Guinea	—	MTI ZC ($448M)	TRANSPORT ZC ($70M)	Success in Health (62.6% S+) but fails in both macro and transport.
Niger	—	MTI ZC ($1.65bn)	TRANSPORT ZC ($58M)	Zero S+ across MTI and Transport. CPIA deteriorated in every targeted criterion.

Sources: Zero Club Part 9 (MTI), Part 10 (Health), Part 11 (Transport). Commitment figures approximate.

DRC is the definitive case. The Bank committed $982 million to health across 4 projects — zero Satisfactory. It committed $1.7 billion to MTI across 6 projects — zero Satisfactory. It committed $948 million to transport across 4 projects — zero Satisfactory. Total: $3.6 billion across three sectors and 14 projects. Not one Satisfactory outcome in any sector. The DRC Multi-modal Transport Project (P092537, $255M, Highly Unsatisfactory) is one of the worst-rated projects in the Africa transport portfolio: IEG found 'in a post-conflict country, characterized by weak implementation capacity and political inertia, it is critical to manage expectations, limit the scope.' The lesson was identified. The DRC transport portfolio received $693 million more in subsequent operations.

Lesotho is the smallest and most analytically precise case. A landlocked mountain kingdom with 2.2 million people. Three health projects ($74M, 0% S+). Three MTI projects ($87M, 0% S+). Three transport projects ($131M, 0% S+). Across 22 years, nine evaluated projects in three sectors. Not one Satisfactory. The binding constraint is not sector-specific. It is a structural ceiling on what Bank projects can deliver in Lesotho's institutional environment, regardless of what they are funding.

Guinea is the analytically interesting outlier. It appears in the MTI Zero Club and Transport Zero Club but is a counterexample in Health (62.6% S+ on $151M). The same government, the same public administration, the same institutional environment. Health succeeded through focused disease-specific projects. MTI failed through broad DPF conditionality. Transport failed through overly ambitious road programmes. The GP that matched its design to what Guinea's institutions could absorb delivered Satisfactory outcomes. The GPs that did not, failed. Guinea is not a zero-delivery country. It is a design-capacity mismatch country.

THE CROSS-SECTOR FINDING

DRC has zero Satisfactory outcomes across Health, MTI, and Transport. Three sectors, three instruments, $3.6 billion, one result. Lesotho has zero Satisfactory

across all three sectors across 22 years. When the same country fails across different GPs, different instruments, and different design teams, the failure cannot be attributed to sector-specific factors. The binding constraint is the interaction between institutional environment, implementation capacity, and a project design model that does not adapt to either.

4. The Transport Record: What the Platform Has Already Documented

A companion analysis (The Transport Record, mdbreform.com/transport-record/, April 2026) examines the 65 IEG-rated Transport projects closing between FY2015 and FY2026 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its findings provide the recent-decade context for the Zero Club:

4.1% S+ by commitment on $11.2 billion. Of $11.2 billion committed, only $458 million — 4 cents on the dollar — went to Satisfactory projects. The 7 successes averaged $65 million. The 58 failures averaged $185 million. Every large transport operation in Africa failed to reach Satisfactory. The global Transport S+ rate is 32.3 percent. Africa underperforms by 22 percentage points.

Twelve countries with two or more projects at zero Satisfactory (FY2015–2026 cohort). Beyond the 7-country all-time Zero Club, the Transport Record identifies 12 countries that have not achieved Satisfactory in the recent decade: Kenya ($1.4bn, 4 projects), Ethiopia ($1.2bn, 4 projects), Nigeria ($918M, 5 projects), DRC ($494M, 3 projects), Tanzania ($490M, 2 projects), Ghana ($404M, 3 projects), Senegal ($289M, 2 projects), and Côte d'Ivoire ($130M, 2 projects). These are not small or marginal economies. They are the Bank's largest transport borrowers on the continent.

The connective tissue argument. The Transport Record frames the sector's importance precisely: 'Transport is the foundation of every other sector initiative the Bank is scaling. AgriConnect cannot get crops to market without roads. Health Works cannot staff clinics without connectivity. Mission 300 cannot maintain grids without logistics infrastructure.' The Bank's own May 2025 report found 37 percent of food lost in transit, transport adding up to 30 percent to final food costs, and 58 percent of Africans food insecure. The Bank publishes the diagnosis while its transport portfolio delivers at 4 cents on the dollar.

The MS concentration. The Transport Record notes the gap between the Bank's MS+ headline rate (approximately 75 percent in the recent decade) and the S+ rate (10.8 percent). The gap is wider in transport than in any other sector because transport projects — which involve physical construction — almost always achieve some infrastructure output. Roads get built. Bridges get completed. The MS rating absorbs the fact that the infrastructure is not maintained, not used as efficiently as designed, and not embedded in the institutional systems that would sustain it.

5. The Five Failure Modes

IEG lesson text across all 143 transport projects was analysed systematically. Maintenance and sustainability appear 212 times — the dominant theme in every decade. Post-conflict and fragility: 134. Implementation delays: 127. M&E weakness: 89. Safeguards and resettlement: 76. Contractor capacity: 37. Maintenance mentions increased from 0.7 per project in the 1990s to 1.2 in the 2010s — the problem is cited more frequently over time, not less. The Bank documents the lesson more carefully. The design model does not change.

1. Maintenance financing absent from design — the defining transport failure. This is the transport sector's version of isomorphic mimicry: physical infrastructure is created (the form), but the institutional systems for maintenance are not (the function). South Sudan (P095081, $92M, MS): 'Regardless of the level of investments put in for rehabilitating the infrastructure, adequate maintenance funding and capacity of the responsible agencies are critical.' Burundi (P150929, $25M, MS): 'This project did not include a maintenance programme.' Ghana (FY2002, $703M, S) — the Bank's largest S-rated transport project in Africa — documents the solution: 'Maintenance of existing assets needs to be given a priority over the expansion of road networks.' The lesson is stated in S-rated projects. The Zero Club documents what happens when it is not applied.

2. Post-conflict scope overreach (DRC, Sierra Leone, Burundi). DRC Multi-modal Transport (P092537, $255M, HU) — the only HU-rated project in the Zero Club. IEG: 'The scope of the project was ambitious and covered all transport subsectors: railways, inland waterways, ports, port access channel/maritime transport, airports and aviation.' Everything simultaneously in a country the size of Western Europe with minimal functioning government. Sierra Leone (P002407, $82M, MU): 'Projects implemented in countries with an ongoing conflict need to be continually monitored. Some types of projects, such as large-scale, capital-intensive projects, may be more vulnerable to conflict risk.' Burundi (P064876, $51M, MU): 'For post-conflict affected countries, project objectives, designs, implementation arrangements need to be more focused.'

3. Contractor capacity mismatch (Niger, Guinea, Lesotho). The Bank designs contracts for a contractor market that does not exist. Niger (P101434, $30M, MS): 'The size and scope of a contract should take into account local capacity and experience. Local contractors did not have the managerial or technical skills to execute large road works contracts.' Guinea (P164543, $40M, U): 'The target of rehabilitating 800 km of rural roads was overly ambitious. A phased approach, focusing initially on 350 km, would have been more realistic.' The same Guinea lesson appeared in its 2005 MU-rated project: 'A well-functioning agency with strong management and financial management capacities is necessary.' Fourteen years apart. The same diagnosis. The same result.

4. The three largest transport failures in Africa. Tanzania Roads I (FY1990, $791M, Highly Unsatisfactory) — the single largest transport project failure on the continent. IEG: 'Corrupt practices can significantly impact project implementation. The lessons of experience from previous operations should be taken into account in the design of follow-on projects.' $791 million. Corruption documented. The lesson: learn from the past. The next project was approved. Kenya National Urban Transport (FY2013, $300M, U): 'In countries where the sector policy environment is changing rapidly, the project design needs to be flexible or Board approval could be postponed.' The government adopted a new Integrated National Transport Policy mid-implementation; the project design was rendered obsolete. Nigeria Highway Sector Loan (FY1988, $250M, U): IEG found 'there are no other lessons that can be

supported by the evidence.' A $250 million failure from which IEG could extract no transferable lesson. The project simply failed.

5. Safeguards, resettlement, and institutional overreach (Uganda, Kenya). Transport is unique in the Zero Club series for the prominence of land acquisition and environmental safeguards — 76 mentions across 143 projects, rising from zero in the 1990s to 0.8 per project in the 2010s. Uganda (P092837, $196M, U): 'New transport agencies should only be established when there is sound understanding of the financial, legal and political implications. Envisioning establishment of four new agencies was unrealistic.' The project attempted to create four new institutional bodies simultaneously — road safety, metropolitan transport, multi-modal, and regulatory — while building roads. Institutional creation does not happen as a side-effect of construction contracts.

What S-rated projects teach. Mauritius Port (FY1995, $75M, Highly Satisfactory): 'This project was highly successful because from the outset there was strong government commitment, supported by the implementing agencies, to reform the port sector. There was consistency in political will and a constant vision despite changes in administrations.' Liberia (FY2009, $129M, S): 'Sector reforms can be implemented in a FCV context through a programmatic gradual approach that spreads expected reforms over several operations.' Mali (FY2018, $70M, S): 'Long-term continuous and stable engagement on the part of the World Bank can be helpful.' Ghana Feeder Roads (FY1992, $98M, HS): 'Significant benefits accrue from low-volume rural roads that are not easily measurable through traditional economic evaluation.' The Bank knows what works in transport. Government commitment. Gradual reform. Long-term engagement. Simple rural roads. The Zero Club is where none of these conditions were met.

THE LESSON FINDING

Tanzania Roads I: $791 million, Highly Unsatisfactory, corruption documented. Nigeria Highway: $250 million, Unsatisfactory, 'no other lessons that can be supported by the evidence.' Kenya Urban Transport: $300 million, Unsatisfactory, policy environment changed mid-project. The three largest transport failures in Africa total $1.3 billion. Maintenance is cited more frequently over time, not less — rising from 0.7 per project in the 1990s to 1.2 in the 2010s. The road gets built. Then it deteriorates. The project is rated MS. The next project is prepared.

6. Why Transport is the Clearest MS Equilibrium

The Transport Zero Club has the most MS-heavy rating distribution in the series — 62 percent MS, compared to 53 percent in Health and 42 percent in MTI. This is not accidental. Transport projects have structural features that make the MS equilibrium almost impossible to escape:

Physical outputs are visible. A road exists or it does not. A bridge stands or it does not. IEG cannot rate a transport project Unsatisfactory if the road was built, even if it deteriorates after project close, even if the institutional framework for maintenance was never established, even if the corridor is not used at the volumes projected. The infrastructure output absorbs the MS rating.

Sustainability is evaluated separately. IEG rates sustainability separately from outcomes. A project can be rated MS on outcomes while being rated Unlikely on sustainability. The Kenya Road Sector Investment Programme (P126321, $300M, U) is the exception — rated Unsatisfactory when even the physical outputs were not delivered. But for most transport projects, the physical output buys an MS regardless of whether the institutional, maintenance, or corridor management objectives were achieved.

Disbursement is straightforward. Civil works contracts can be structured to disburse predictably against construction milestones. Transport projects meet disbursement targets better than almost any other sector. High disbursement rates produce favorable mid-term reviews. Favorable mid-term reviews produce MS. The institutional objectives that determine whether the road ‘holds’ after project close are the last to be evaluated, by which time disbursement has already signalled success.

The MS equilibrium in transport therefore has a physical dimension that is unique to the sector. In MTI, MS means a law was enacted but not implemented. In Health, MS means clinics were built but quality of care did not improve. In Transport, MS means the road was built but will not be maintained. The form is infrastructure. The function is connectivity. The Bank delivers the form. The function depends on what happens after the project closes. The rating does not capture that distinction.

7. Counterexamples: Where Transport Works

Four countries demonstrate that Transport can succeed in Sub-Saharan Africa — and why:

Rwanda achieves 93.9% S+ on $163M across 4 projects — the highest transport S+ rate in Africa. The same governance foundation that explains Rwanda's health and MTI success explains its transport success: strong implementation discipline, predictable maintenance financing, and an institutional framework built before projects scaled. Rwanda's PEFA scores on procurement (PI-24) and budget reliability (PI-01) are among the highest in SSA — the same indicators that determine whether road contracts are executed well and maintenance budgets are honoured.

Cameroon achieves 64.4% S+ on $280M across 5 projects — including four Satisfactory ratings. Cameroon's transport success contrasts starkly with its Health and MTI records (both 0% S+). The difference appears to be sector-specific: Cameroon has a functioning Roads Authority (Roads Fund) that provides a credible maintenance financing mechanism. Health and MTI require cross-ministerial coordination; transport can be routed through a single sector institution with predictable financing.

Senegal achieves 71.9% S+ on $1.4 billion across 7 projects — the largest Satisfactory transport portfolio in Africa by commitment. Senegal's success is driven by two large S-rated projects: the Dakar-Diamniadio Toll Road ($540M, S) and Transport Sector Modernization ($300M, S). Both had a single corridor focus, a clear PPP or user-financing framework, and strong government ownership of the objective. Focused design and genuine government commitment to a specific corridor.

Ghana achieves 68.0% S+ on $1.5 billion across 7 projects. Ghana's transport record combines early rehabilitation successes with recent failures (two MU in the FY2015–2026 cohort). The pattern suggests Ghana's transport capacity enabled early Bank projects but is being stretched by increasingly complex, multi-modal designs.

The pattern across counterexamples: Transport succeeds where (a) a single institution with predictable financing manages the sector (Rwanda's MININFRA, Senegal's AGEROUTE); (b) project design focuses on a single corridor or mode rather than system-wide transformation; (c) maintenance financing is established before construction is complete; and (d) government ownership is genuine rather than performative. These conditions are structurally similar to those the Health and MTI papers identified. The Zero Club persists where all four are absent.

Country	Why It Escaped
Rwanda	Strong state implementation discipline; PEFA-rated procurement; maintenance financing built into sector framework
Cameroon	Roads Fund provides credible maintenance financing; sector routed through single institution (transport only)
Senegal	Single corridor focus; PPP/toll road framework for Dakar-Diamniadio; genuine government ownership
Ghana	Early rehabilitation projects matched capacity; GPHA as credible port authority; single sector ownership

Countries with ≥3 Transport projects and >50% S+ rate.

8. What This Paper Does Not Claim

The paper does not claim that no infrastructure was built in the seven Zero Club countries; that roads do not exist; that transport investments produced zero benefit; or that these countries should not receive transport support. Roads were built. Bridges were constructed. Some connections were improved. That is what Moderately Satisfactory means.

The paper does claim that the Bank's own evaluation benchmark was never reached in these countries across 19 projects and $1.65 billion over up to 34 years. The same lessons were documented by IEG across multiple evaluation cycles without design modification. Project scope repeatedly exceeded implementation capacity. Maintenance financing was systematically absent from design. Commitment growth was not tied to demonstrated outcome performance. These are findings of institutional pattern, not of country failure.

The broader IEG evidence is consistent with these findings. IEG's evaluation of roads in low-income countries has consistently found that physical completion rates are higher than functional outcome achievement; that maintenance financing is the most frequently cited sustainability gap; and that institutional capacity for road network management develops more slowly than the roads themselves. The Transport Zero Club reaches these conclusions through a different lens: the consistent absence of Satisfactory ratings confirms what sector evaluations have found for decades. The design model has not changed.

9. Conclusion

The Transport Zero Club documents the third major pattern of sustained underperformance in the World Bank's Africa portfolio. Seven countries, 19 projects, $1.65 billion committed, zero percent Satisfactory. The sector's recent decade record — 2.4 percent S+ by commitment on $10 billion — is the worst of any sector in the series.

The MTI Zero Club (Part 9) documented failure in DPFs. The Health Zero Club (Part 10) showed the same pattern in IPFs. The Transport Zero Club confirms it in the most operationally intensive IPF sector in Africa — physical construction, contractor management, site supervision, procurement of assets. If the Bank cannot achieve Satisfactory in transport, which has visible physical outputs, the question is not whether the instrument is right. It is whether the institutional model that designs, supervises, and evaluates projects is calibrated to the environments in which it operates.

DRC and Lesotho have now failed across Health, MTI, and Transport simultaneously. Three sectors, three instruments, three design teams, the same result. The evidence points toward the interaction between institutional environment, implementation discipline, and project design as the determinants of whether development finance produces its intended outcomes — not the choice of sector, instrument, or Global Practice.

The findings are consistent with the broader evidence on the platform. The Transport Record (April 2026) found $11.2 billion committed to transport in Africa in the recent decade at 4.1 percent S+. The Health Record (April 2026) found $8.4 billion at 34.6 percent S+. The IDA21 Performance analysis found 31 percent S+ across the entire portfolio. Across every sector record on this platform, the pattern is the same: the Bank's corporate reporting counts MS as success, the genuine performance benchmark is not reached, the pipeline continues, and the countries repay.

THE MISSING COUNTERFACTUAL

Transport is the foundation of every other sector the Bank is scaling. AgriConnect needs roads. Health Works needs connectivity. Mission 300 needs logistics. If the sector that underpins all other delivery is performing at 2.4 cents on the dollar in its largest decade, the initiatives that depend on it are building on a foundation that does not hold. The Bank has no mechanism that connects transport outcome performance to transport lending authority. No institutional actor has an incentive to propose one.

The Zero Club series now covers three sectors. MTI: 14 countries, $10.4bn, 0%. Health: 14 countries, $3.0bn, 0%. Transport: 7 countries, $1.65bn, 0%. The instrument varies. The GP varies. The design varies. The countries partially overlap. The outcome is identical. The evidence increasingly points not at sector-specific design failures but at a system-level institutional pattern in which Moderately Satisfactory is the equilibrium, the pipeline is self-sustaining, and the lessons are documented but not operationalised. That is what the next paper in this series — the synthesis — will address.

The Case Study Series

#	Paper	Committed	S+	Status
#1	Nigeria Water	$1.8bn	0.4%	Published
#2	Angola DPF	$2.2bn	0%	Published
#3	South Africa ESKOM	$9.13bn	—	Published
#4	Ghana FCI	~$500M	0%	Published
#5	DRC Portfolio	$6.7bn	6.1%	Published
#6	DRC Inga	$107M+	—	Published
#7	Somalia	~$900M	89%	Published
#8	Rwanda	$4.6bn	68.5%	Published
#9	Zero Club — MTI in Africa	$10.4bn	0%	Published
#10	Zero Club — Health in Africa	$3.0bn	0%	Published
#11	Zero Club — Transport	$1.65bn	0%	This paper

Companion sector records: The Health Record (mdbreform.com/health-record/), The Transport Record (mdbreform.com/transport-record/), The FCI Record (mdbreform.com/fci-record/), The Agriculture Record (mdbreform.com/agriculture-record/), The Water Record (mdbreform.com/water-record/). Companion analytical papers: Policy Without Performance — Isomorphic Mimicry and the DPO Incentive Trap; Institutional Power Architecture and Portfolio Distortion at the World Bank; Game Theory — Why the System Does Not Learn; The Rwanda Model.

Selected References

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Annex: The Seven Zero Club Countries

Each profile summarises the Transport portfolio, the IEG diagnosis, and the failure mode.

DRC — $948M, 4 projects, 0% S+

Post-conflict state absence · Scope overreach

P-Code	Project Name	FY	Rating	Commit
P057296	Emergency Multisector Rehabilitation	FY2003	MS	$454M
P092537	DRC Multi-modal Transport	FY2010	HU	$255M
P101745	High Priority Roads Reopening	FY2008	MS	$187M
P153085	Goma Airport Safety Improvement	FY2015	MS	$52M

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026.

Diagnosis. The Multi-modal Transport Project (P092537, $255M, HU) is the most damaging project in the Zero Club. Attempting to rehabilitate Congo River navigation, national roads, and urban roads simultaneously across a country the size of Western Europe with minimal functioning government. IEG: ‘In a post-conflict country, characterized by weak implementation capacity and political inertia, it is critical to manage expectations, limit the scope.’ The project was rated Highly Unsatisfactory — the only HU in the Transport Zero Club. The DRC emergency operations (FY2003) and roads projects (FY2008) achieved MS through modest post-conflict benchmarks. DRC also appears in the Health Zero Club ($982M, 0%) and MTI Zero Club ($1.7bn, 0%).

Learning evidence. No. The HU rating did not prevent subsequent transport commitments. The Goma Airport project (FY2015, MS) adopted a more focused design but the broader transport programme continued at scale.

Sierra Leone — $172M, 3 projects, 0% S+

Post-conflict · Institutional reform overreach

P-Code	Project Name	FY	Rating	Commit
P002407	Roads Rehabilitation and Maintenance	FY1993	MU	$82M
P002420	Transport Sector SIM	FY1996	MS	$35M
P078389	Infrastructure Development (Transport)	FY2006	MS	$55M

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026.

Diagnosis. Three projects spanning 1993–2014. Post-conflict road rehabilitation combined with institutional reform objectives that could not be achieved in a conflict-affected environment. P002407 (MU): ‘Projects implemented in countries with an ongoing conflict need to be continually monitored.’ ‘Some types of projects, such as large-scale, capital-intensive projects, may be more vulnerable to conflict risk.’ P078389 (MS): ‘Institutional reforms take far longer than expected, especially in fragile states.’

Learning evidence. Partially. The FY2006 project was more focused. But institutional reform objectives were never achieved.

Burundi — $141M, 3 projects, 0% S+

Post-conflict · Maintenance absent from design

P-Code	Project Name	FY	Rating	Commit
P000204	Transport Sector	FY1990	MU	$65M
P064876	Road Sector Development	FY2004	MU	$51M
P150929	Infrastructure Resilience Emergency	FY2015	MS	$25M

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026.

Diagnosis. Three projects spanning 1990–2019. P000204 (MU): ‘The capacity of sector organizations must be rehabilitated and restored and the political basis for reform must be established.’ P064876 (MU): ‘For post-conflict affected countries, project objectives, designs, implementation arrangements need to be more focused.’ P150929 (MS): ‘This project did not include a maintenance programme.’ The maintenance gap was identified in FY2019. It was absent from every preceding project.

Learning evidence. Partially. The FY2015 project was better scoped. But maintenance financing was never embedded.

Lesotho — $131M, 3 projects, 0% S+

Small state · Cost estimation and maintenance gaps

P-Code	Project Name	FY	Rating	Commit
P001403	Road Rehabilitation and Maintenance	FY1996	MS	$65M
P075566	Integrated Transport Project	FY2007	MS	$48M
P155229	Transport Infrastructure and Connectivity	FY2018	MS	$18M

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026.

Diagnosis. Three MS-rated projects across 28 years. All achieved partial physical outputs. Lesotho's transport record mirrors its health and MTI records — a structural ceiling on what Bank projects can achieve in a small, landlocked, SACU-dependent state. P075566 (MS): 'There is a need for better due diligence when making project cost estimates.' The FY2018 project incorporated a Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC) that was successfully activated after flooding in 2021 — a positive adaptation. But none of the three projects crossed the Satisfactory threshold.

Learning evidence. Partially. The FY2018 project shows better adaptive design. But 28 years without one S suggests a structural ceiling.

South Sudan — $130M, 2 projects, 0% S+

Post-conflict · Maintenance financing absent

P-Code	Project Name	FY	Rating	Commit
P095081	Emergency Transport and Infrastructure	FY2006	MS	$92M
P129000	South Sudan Rural Roads Project	FY2012	MS	$38M

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026.

Diagnosis. South Sudan is an anomaly: it is a counterexample in Health (67.9% S+) but in the Transport Zero Club. Both transport projects achieved physical outputs (roads rehabilitated) but not sustainable outcomes. P095081 (MS): 'Adequate maintenance funding and the capacity of responsible agencies are critical.' 'It is prudent to establish a stable and sustainable road maintenance financing scheme.' P129000 (MS): 'Denominating works contracts in USD or an equivalent stable currency may mitigate risks of exchange rate fluctuation.'

Learning evidence. Partially. The pattern — roads built, maintenance absent — is consistent. Health projects in South Sudan worked because they used external NGO delivery with bounded objectives. Transport used government systems.

Guinea — $70M, 2 projects, 0% S+

Capacity mismatch · Governance and fragility ignored at design

P-Code	Project Name	FY	Rating	Commit
P065127	National Rural Infrastructure Project	FY2005	MU	$30M
P164543	Rural Mobility and Connectivity	FY2019	U	$40M

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026.

Diagnosis. Two projects spanning 2005–2024. The same failure repeated 14 years apart. P065127 (MU): 'A well-functioning agency with strong management and financial management capacities is necessary. This risk should have been mitigated as part of the preparation process.' P164543 (U): 'The design needs to reflect the country context and the challenges faced by the country, including fragility, governance and capacity issues.' Guinea is a counterexample in Health (62.6% S+) but the same government failed to deliver transport projects. The difference: health projects used disease-specific vertical delivery. Transport projects used government systems that lacked the capacity the design assumed.

Learning evidence. No. The FY2019 project replicated the same institutional design assumption that caused the FY2005 failure.

Niger — $58M, 2 projects, 0% S+

Political disruption · Capacity mismatch

P-Code	Project Name	FY	Rating	Commit
P035608	Transport Infrastructure Rehabilitation	FY1998	MU	$28M
P101434	Transport Sector Programme Support	FY2008	MS	$30M

Source: IEG ICRR/PPAR database, March 2026.

Diagnosis. Two projects spanning 1998–2016. Niger is also in the MTI Zero Club (15 projects, $1.65bn, 0%). P035608 (MU): ‘When major exogenous events occur (such as a coup d’état) it is often appropriate to review the implications for successful completion.’ P101434 (MS): ‘The size and scope of a contract should take into account local capacity and experience. Local contractors did not have the managerial or technical skills to execute large road works contracts.’

Learning evidence. Partially. The FY2008 project showed more realistic scoping. But both sectors — MTI and Transport — fail in Niger.