AVANTI

Advancing Knowledge
for Agricultural Impact

AG-Scan: assessing government capacities to measure SDGs

An AG-Scan in action in Samoa   Image: ©AVANTI

The Agricultural Capacity Scan (AG-Scan) is a participatory process that contributes to improving governments' abilities to measure progress towards SDGs by assessing RBM capacities.

Contents

List of Acronyms

AVANTI	Advancing Knowledge for Agricultural Development	**MAFS**	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
CAP Scan	Capacity scan	**M&E**	Monitoring and Evaluation
GCG	Government Contact Group	**MfDR**	Managing for Development Results
GCP	Government Contact Person		
IC	International Consultant	**NC**	National Consultant
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development	**RBM**	Results-based Management
		SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ISC	International Senior Consultant		
LEAPS	Leadership, Evaluation and Monitoring, Accountability and Partnerships, Planning and Budgeting, Statistics		

1. Introduction

What is the AVANTI Initiative?

AVANTI – "Advancing Knowledge for Agricultural Impact" – is a global initiative funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). It supports national partners, in particular national governments, to self-assess and prioritize actions for strengthening results-based management (RBM) and to share their experiences with a wider audience. Ultimately, AVANTI aims to improve countries' ability to measure progress against Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that relate to agriculture and rural development.

What is the AVANTI User Guide?

This User Guide is one of a series of tools in the AVANTI toolbox, designed to guide implementers in conducting AG-Scan self-assessment workshops. It is targeted mainly at the AVANTI implementing team, national partners, such as host government ministries and departments, and private and development partners. It provides an overview of the AVANTI initiative; its objectives and outcomes, background, methodology and implementation process, and ends with next steps to be carried out by national governments and their in-country partners. In addition, this User Guide can act as a useful foundation for the development of broader capacity self-assessment exercises.

What are AVANTI's objectives?

Goal: To contribute to the evidence-based design and implementation of agricultural policies and programs by improving the measurability of the progress towards SDG targets.

Objective: To enhance knowledge about the shortcomings of, and solutions for, better results-based management (RBM), and to foster engagement in implementing concrete and resourced action plans to improve measurement, analysis, management and communication of results on SDG targets in the agriculture sector.

Outcomes:

- Strengthened capacity of national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) units to design and engage in the implementation of concrete and resourced Action Plans, with clear responsibilities for improving data quality, collection methods, analysis and uptake in the agriculture sector

- Increased knowledge about the strengths and shortcomings of RBM, and greater application of knowledge products to improve monitoring of agriculture-related SDG indicators

Who are the AVANTI partners?

The AVANTI Initiative is funded and overseen by IFAD, and implemented by Helvetas and Itad:

The International Fund for Agricultural Development is an international financial institution and a specialised agency of the United Nations.

Helvetas is an independent Swiss development organization that is building capacity in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Itad is a consultancy specialising in monitoring, evaluation and learning. We want resources invested in international development to have the greatest possible impact.

2. Background

What are the origins of the AG-Scan methodology?

The AVANTI Initiative adapts a methodology – the Capacity Scan (CAP-Scan) – which has been successfully used to strengthen capacities in various national-level M&E systems. The AVANTI AG-Scan is an adaptation of the CAP-Scan for the agricultural sector. The CAP-Scan methodology was associated with Managing for Development Results (MfDR), a concept closely related to RBM, which was part of the discourse around the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008). The two instruments emphasized **ownership** of the results agenda by developing countries. It is in this spirit of country ownership that AVANTI was designed.

What key aspects is AVANTI centered on?

AVANTI is centered on three distinct but interrelated aspects: **results-based management, country ownership and the Sustainable Development Goals.**

RBM is an approach that helps actors such as governments, organizations and program managers identify appropriate measurable results to aim for, and to use reliable evidence on actual results: a) for accountability and reporting to stakeholders; and b) to inform decision making on the design, resourcing and delivery of continuing and new programs.

Figure 1: **AVANTI focus**

National ownership is another important aspect of AVANTI. The 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation highlights the importance of strengthening efforts to achieve concrete and sustainable results, and the importance of strengthening national capacities and better M&E systems. The SDGs, which are the third important aspect of AVANTI, require countries to raise the bar in terms of RBM and national ownership. Governments need the means and capacity to accurately measure, track, report progress, and use evidence for decision making against SDG indicators. The AG-Scan methodology is therefore designed to enhance country ownership of the results agenda by strengthening RBM and, ultimately, their ability to measure progress against the SDGs.
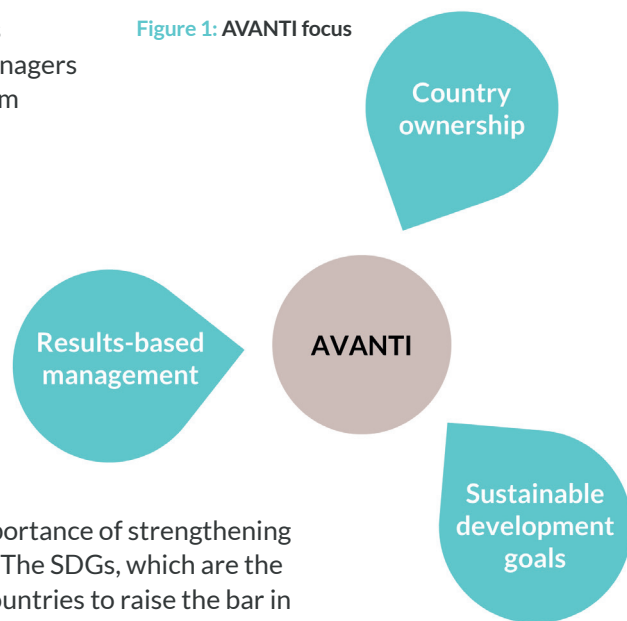
## What is the process and who should participate?

AVANTI works with national ministries and other partners to facilitate a self-assessment and action-planning process called 'AG-Scan' (Agricultural Scanning of RBM capacities). The AG-Scan provides an opportunity for participants to assess relevant institutional systems and capacities for RBM. The self-assessment and the action planning that follows are facilitated by a team of AVANTI national and international facilitators. Typically, an AVANTI core country team consists of an International Senior Consultant (ISC), an International Consultant (IC) and a National Consultant (NC).

3. The AG-Scan Process

Pre-workshop preparation	▶	Self-assessment workshop	▶	Post-workshop action plan
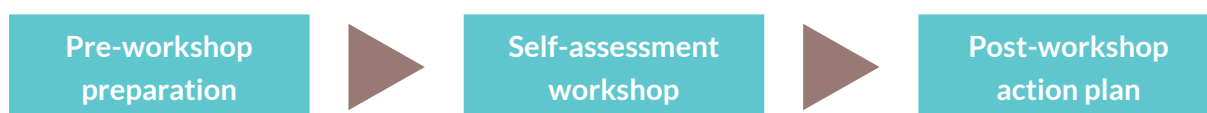
The AG-Scan methodological process involves seven steps, from the time national governments scope the task involved, in partnership with IFAD, to implementation of improvements identified in the action plan (Figure 2).

Figure 2: **The AG-Scan process**
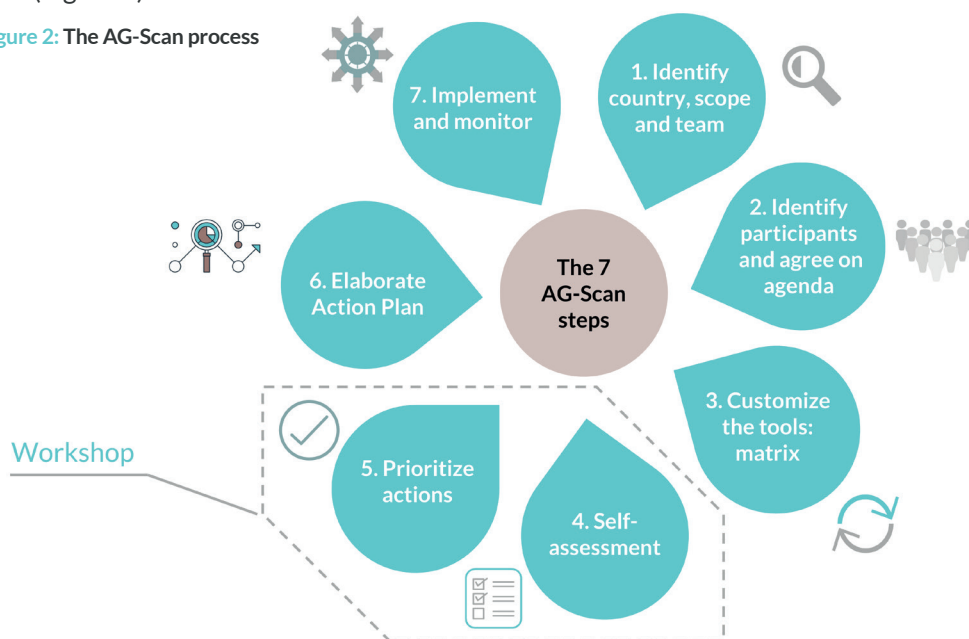
Broadly, these seven steps can be sub- divided into three operational stages:

- Pre-workshop preparation: context analysis and customization (Steps 1-3)
- Self-assessment workshop (Steps 4-5)
- Action planning, implementation and M&E (Steps 6-7)

3.1 Pre-Workshop Preparation

Pre-workshop preparation	▶	Self-assessment workshop	▶	Post-workshop action plan
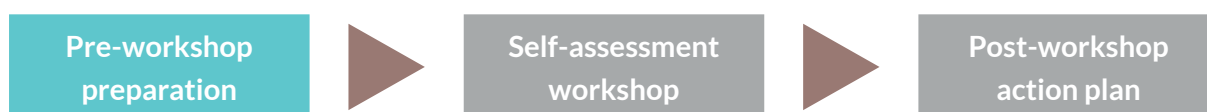
The pre-workshop phase consists of three preliminary steps:

- Identifying country, scope and national team
- Identifying workshop participants
- Customizing the methodology to country context

3. 1.1 Identifying country, scope and government contact

IFAD Country Program Managers initiate the AVANTI process by introducing the initiative to national government counterparts to seek interest. Engagement should be at very senior levels in government; i.e. ministerial level, with all agreements communicated officially in writing. In some countries, it may be necessary to reach out more widely to a number of government ministries, in addition to the ministry holding the mandate for agricultural development. These may include such ministries as those presiding over planning and budgeting, or natural resources management.

In select cases, the process of identifying a country may involve a **scoping mission,** where a member of the AVANTI core team travels in-country to introduce AVANTI and explore the level of interest and buy-in from various stakeholders.

In the event of buy-in, the government nominates a Government Contact Person (GCP) or Government Contact Group (GCG) to lead and preside over the AG-Scan process and outcomes on behalf of their country. They assist in identifying a national consultant to join the AVANTI team of facilitators/implementing team. Together with the GCP/GCG, the AVANTI implementing team agrees on the scope of work for the AG-Scan workshop, avoiding duplication and ensuring complementarity with existing related initiatives in the country. They also hold the responsibility to follow up on implementation of the Action Plan.

3.1.2 Identify country team and participants

In collaboration with the Government Contact Person or Group (IFAD's senior contact point in the host ministry), a core team of stakeholders is formed to lead the AG-Scan process, and their respective roles allocated. This core team could include representatives from two or more key government departments, and possibly a representative from the international development community. Collectively, this group should be conversant in all pillars of the AG-Scan methodology, described in Chapter 2. The group reviews the focus and scope of work and considers who should attend the workshop. A key principle is that all decisions should be **led by government** stakeholders. Internal promotion and invitations to the selected participants should also come from a high-level representative within the government.
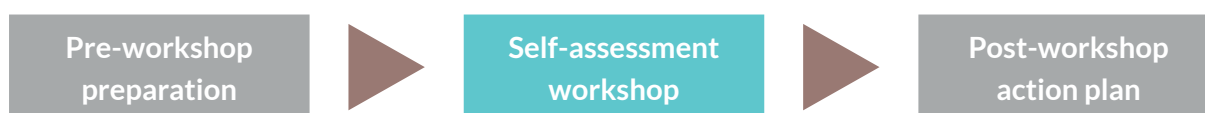
Figure 3: The AG-Scan pillars

3. 1.3 Customize Methodology

The process of customization involves adaptation of the process, methods, tools and content of the AG-Scan matrix to suit the country context and government priorities. Although the customization refers primarily to the methodology, it can be carried out in different ways:

- The **scope** of the AG-Scan – the AG-Scan can serve as a continuation/deepening of ongoing processes; it can be used to fill existing gaps, or it can also serve as a first brainstorming exercise.

- AG-Scans may be tailored to specifically contribute to other initiatives and serve the existing development agenda of the ministries (e.g. in Bolivia the "Agenda Patriótica"[1])

- The bulk of work relates to customization **of the AG-Scan matrix** and the tools for assessment, validation and prioritization to the national context and priorities. Below are a few examples of how the methodology has been customized to country contexts:

  – In Bolivia, the M&E of SDG progress was replaced by M&E of the Agenda Patriótica

  – In Cameroon, all refence to evaluation was removed from the methodology, as the country's current systems focus primarily on monitoring rather than evaluation

  – In Lesotho, pointers linking staff performance to RBM were excluded, as this does not reflect common practice in the country

  – In Peru, collaboration with the Ministries of Finance and Planning was placed at the center of discussion and analysis

  – In Tunisia, nutrition and statistics were the focus of the assessment and action planning

---

[1] https://observatorioplanificacion.cepal.org/es/planes/agenda-patriotica-2025-plan-de-desarrollo-general-economico-y-social-para-el-vivir-bien

AG-Scan Methodology: A guide for in-country users

3.2 Self-Assessment Workshop

Pre-workshop preparation	→	Self-assessment workshop	→	Post-workshop action plan

3.2.1 Self- Assessment

A self-assessment workshop is typically held over two or three days. It is facilitated by the AVANTI implementing team, but should be hosted by key government stakeholders, such as the GCP/G. The workshop agenda usually includes an introduction to AVANTI, a discussion of RBM, both in general and in the national context, agreement of the unit of analysis, and the self-assessment process itself. The workshop is a good platform for inter-departmental or inter-ministerial knowledge sharing. The example of Cameroon (Box 1) is an illustrative example of the content of a typical AG-Scan workshop.

From the AG-Scan experience in various countries, self-assessment workshops tend to function well with between 20 and 30 people: large enough to capture a broad range of experience and interest (diversity), but small enough to facilitate the necessary depth of discussions. Typically, the majority of participants should be representatives of government ministries, departments and agencies with a strong interest in rural development, the associated SDGs and M&E. They should include staff with technical experience of RBM or M&E. Workshop participants could include representatives from ministries responsible for agriculture, development planning, the environment and gender equality, as well as those presiding over national statistics and finances. In addition, participants could include representatives of key project implementation units, civil society, relevant multi-lateral and bi-laterals, development partners, and the private sector.

The bulk of the time is spent assessing the strengths and weaknesses of existing capacities along the five pillars and 29 subcomponents of RBM that are elaborated in the customized AG-Scan matrix. Experience shows that this is better managed by dividing the participants into between three and five small groups of four to eight people.

AG-Scan tools

Table 1: Summary of AG-Scan Matrix

PILLAR	SUMMARY
Leadership	Assessment of interest, commitment and political will by decision makers and senior management in promoting a culture of results, including evidence-based decision making
Evaluation & Monitoring	How does the sector use monitoring and evaluation functions in decision making, management and accountability?
Accountability & Partnerships	Assessment of accountability and transparency by government to citizens and partners and vice versa
Planning & Budgeting	How does government use results for planning and budget formulation?
Statistics	Supply, ability, and availability of data and information to feed into decision-making processes

The AG-Scan **matrix** is a set of questions which participants self-assess against a continuum of **column descriptors**. Participants assess their government unit's capacity regarding the five RBM-related components: Leadership, Evaluation & Monitoring, Accountability & Partnerships, Planning & Budgeting,

and Statistics (LEAPS). The column descriptors for each of the LEAPS components range from awareness (lowest rank) through exploration, transition and full implementation (highest rank). It is against these categories that the workshop participants rank their ministries' capacities for each component of RBM.

As participants debate and deliberate on how to rank themselves on the matrix, a dedicated reporter records the discussion and rationale for ranking in the **AG-Scan journal**. All scores are then recorded and presented graphically in the **AG-Scan profile**. While the profile provides a visual picture of self-assessment results, the qualitative detail of the journal provides more nuanced arguments for the ranking, which becomes useful when it comes to prioritizing actions. The Action Plan (further elaborated in Section 3.3) itself is the ultimate output of the self-assessment workshop and action-planning process.

The self-assessment workshop can take various approaches, depending on the time available and the number of participants. Box 1 summarizes the steps and approach taken in the Cameroon context.

Box 1: **Cameroon case study**

STEPS INVOLVED IN THE AG-SCAN WORKSHOP

Step 1. Plenary self-assessment of one pillar

- The ISC takes the whole group through self-assessment of the sub-component on commitment
- A volunteer reads each of the descriptors aloud
- Participants discuss in pairs or threes and agree on the score for this subcomponent
- In turns, group members share their scores and justification on flipcharts
- Through open discussions, all participants reach consensus on the score and justification
- Participants are given the opportunity to seek clarification and ask questions about scoring and justification
- If there is no consensus on a particular score, participants agree on a range; for example, the score is between 1 and 2

Step 2. Self-assessment of pillars/sub-pillars in groups

- Depending on knowledge and expertise, participants form subgroups; e.g. group on planning, group on budgeting, group on statistics
- Group members self-assess and record their main points on Post-it notes
- One member leads the discussion while another volunteer takes notes
- At the end of the session, members post their ranking and justification on flipcharts and present to the rest of the group in plenary
- During plenary, the rest of the group responds to their ranking and justification, leading to agreement or revision of scores and justification

Step 3: Prioritizing strengths and areas of improvement

- The ISC leads a session of analysis of the main themes coming out of the first self-assessment exercise
- Participants agree on main issues and sub-issues
- The session ends with a list of two-three main areas requiring improvement and two-three areas that are working well and can potentially be shared with external audiences for each pillar

Step 4: Synthesis

- The core team and GCP/group that led the customization process sits down and analyses the findings from all groups
- The core team summarizes key themes, recurring topics and critical areas for potential intervention

Step 5: Consolidating priorities

- In plenary, the ISC highlights common themes from all group presentations, for example using color coding to circle recurring themes on the groups' flipcharts. These could be limited capacity, lack of coordination, limited human resources, lack of financial resources
- The group also reflects on some points which may not necessarily recur but are major barriers to RBM and measuring SDGs

Cross-cutting issues

Gender, nutrition and climate change are important aspects of the SDGs in the rural sector which the AVANTI team makes sure to bring into discussion when assessing capacities in RBM.

Gender enhancement and women's empowerment has been embedded in the matrix. See Annex 1.

Box 2 provides some tips for incorporating gender into the methodology of workshop implementation.

Both nutrition and climate change are important topics for rural development which need to be taken into account, although they do not directly map onto the RBM pillars

Box 2: Gender

<div style="background-color:teal;color:white;padding:8px;">

TIPS ON GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN THE WORKSHOP

</div>

Workshop participants: ensure there are sufficient female participants and use affirmative action to reach the target

Facilitation techniques: use methods that increase the active participation of both women and men

Allocation of roles within groups: make sure both women and men take on responsibility for note-taking etc.

Presentations: ensure women and men have equal opportunities and responsibilities to make presentations, including feedback from group work

Nutrition

Evidence of progress towards transition and full implementation should include specific examples of references to SDG targets; in particular:

- Access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

- Awareness of internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and addressing of the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

Climate change

Evidence of progress towards transition and full implementation should include specific examples where references are made to SDG targets; in particular:

- Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

- Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

- Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate-change-related planning and management, including focusing on women, youth, and local and marginalized communities

3.2.2 Prioritize actions

Consolidating priorities becomes the basis for the action-planning workshop, typically a day or two after the self-assessment workshop.

Participants in the Lesotho workshop identified five priority areas, mainly based on recurrence of each theme or relative importance in measuring SDGs. The process of identifying recurring themes was quite organic. As participants reviewed the contents of their discussions recorded on Post-it notes and flipcharts, there were recurrent keywords/themes, such as lack of coordination, capacity and skills, and inadequate human and financial resources. For example: lack of coordination a) among leadership of different departments; b) of evaluation and monitoring efforts across departments and ministries; c) of planning and budgeting efforts across departments, and inadequate skills and capacity at all levels from senior to technical, not only to design and collect data, but to interpret and use data to inform policy and decision making. The group went further to define aspects of the LEAPS that were critical to the achievement of SDGs, and identified Accountability and M&E structures as the weakest links.

PRIORITY AREA	REASON FOR PRIORITIZATION
Coordination: within MAFS, with the Bureau of Statistics and with non-state actors, such as UN/NGOs/private sector	A recurring theme identified under pillars L, E, P, S
Capacity and skills, including ability to interpret data	A recurring theme identified under pillars L, E, P, S
Financial and human resources: performance-based budgeting	Recurring theme across all pillars
Accountability of/and towards non-state actors, including beneficiaries; mandating MAFS to hold all actors to account for data that contributes towards SDGs in the sector	A key issue underpinning poor progress in SDG measurement
Implementation and improvement of existing **M&E structures** within government, leveraging existing systems for sustainability	A key issue underpinning poor progress in SDG measurement

Another approach to prioritization adopted in the Ghana AG-Scan workshop was ranking of the LEAPS pillars. AG-Scan workshop participants rate each subcomponent for its relevance to improving measurement of SDGs on a scale of 0 to 5, where zero represents "not significant for RBM" and five represents "Crucial for RBM". This can be presented in a spider diagram (Figure 4)

Figure 4: **Example for the ranking of subcomponents (Ghana)**
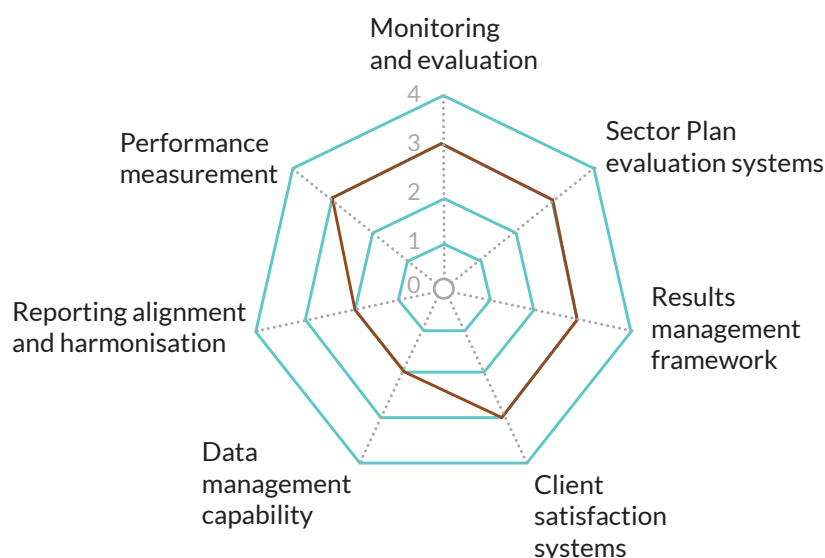
3.2.3 Presentation of certificates of participation

In acknowledgement of participants' inputs, the core team awards attendance certificates to workshop attendees. Only individuals participating fully in the self-assessment exercise are presented with cerificates. This means ceremonial attendees (e.g. those attending only official opening and closing ceremonies) are not included. The presentation ceremony is usually led by the GCP, representative of the minister and the International Senior Consultant.

3.3 Post-Workshop Action Planning

Pre-workshop preparation		Self-assessment workshop		Post-workshop action plan
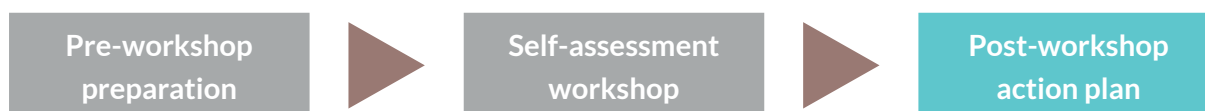
3.3.1 Elaborate Action Plan

Action planning usually begins by default in the workshop, as participants identify gaps and prioritize areas of action. Typically, it is conducted soon after, with a selection of volunteering or designated participants from the self-assessment workshop (Working Group). Experienced facilitators recommend conducting this event immediately after the self-assessment workshop, or at least in the same week.

Typically, an action-planning workshop will have between six and ten participants. It may be helpful to include representatives of international development partners who show interest in supporting RBM strengthening.

Action planning takes its lead from the results of the self-assessment workshop, where participants select components of RBM they perceive to need strengthening. The participants in action planning revisit the AG-Scan portrait and the summaries of the reasoning behind the assessments, and discuss possible actions to strengthen RBM. They need to provisionally identify the actors who should take the lead in each area of strengthening, the resources likely to be required, and the timescale for the implementation of each activity. A template for recording these decisions is provided in Annex 3.

Depending on numbers, it is usually practical to divide participants into groups to discuss different aspects of RBM so that all the key components can be covered in the time available. Membership of each group – and the components chosen for them to discuss – should ideally be based on their particular experience and expertise. For example, representatives from the statistics agencies could discuss data strengthening, while representatives from the planning ministry could focus on the strengthening of results planning.

Importantly, this workshop/meeting should discuss how action planning should be taken forward, with clear commitments and agreement on next steps. This may, for example, involve the formation of a small steering group, possibly similar to the one formed to plan the AG-Scan.

A report on the action-planning workshop/meeting should be compiled and circulated to key stakeholders. This should form the basis for developing an Action Plan which is owned by the government and shared within the ministry.

What happens next?

Action planning does not end with this workshop/meeting. The group tasked with taking matters forward should develop the Action Plan through consultations with key stakeholders in government and beyond. The Action Plan should accord with country norms for such a document and process.

Once the Action Plan is formally agreed and shared within the ministry, and implementation begins, it is important to put a process in place to monitor progress with implementation. It is suggested that a follow-up AG-Scan workshop could be conducted in two to three years to assess where and to what extent strengthening has taken place.

Before, during and after the workshop, the AVANTI country core team are mandated to identify knowledge champions and to focus on specific findings that may be of interest to a wider audience. They systematically (evaluation and final report) inform on such evidence and link to the national participants who have interest, competence and availability to engage in a process of international knowledge sharing. They are supported in elaborating knowledge products (blogs, interviews, short articles) and engage in a process of exchange with experts in other countries (e.g. participation and presentation at international conferences or on online forums).

Although AVANTI's engagement in a country usually ends shortly after a draft Action Plan has been drawn up, it has an objective to capture and share knowledge about RBM strengthening. This can help to identify possible improvements and adaptations to the AG-Scan methodology itself for the benefit

An AG-Scan in action in Bolivia   Image: ©AVANTI

of countries adopting the process in the future. It can also capture countries' experience in taking RBM strengthening forward.

For example, representatives of countries that have taken part in AG-Scans and in RBM strengthening are interviewed or write blogs about their experience. AVANTI will connect national participants with those in other countries in various ways, and share knowledge of RBM strengthening for rural development and SDG progress with global audiences.

3.3.2 Implement and Monitor

The implementation of the Action Plan is largely dependent on the availability of financial and human resources. In some countries, budget support comes from IFAD investments or is embedded within the County Strategic Opportunities Programme. AVANTI has put in place an M&E system to track progress on the implementation of the initiative as well as roll out of the Action Plan. In select countries, the core team intends to replicate the self- assessment process in order to establish the contribution of AVANTI to improvements in national governments' ability to measure SDG related to Agriculture and Rural Development, a year or two after the self- assessment workshop.

Further information

Contact info@avantiagriculture.org

IFAD
Investing in rural people

HELVETAS

itad