



Exploring Results-Based Management Capacities through Self-Assessment:

# Results from the AVANTI Initiative



# INTRODUCTION

The [International Fund for Agricultural Development](#) (IFAD), in collaboration with implementers [Helvetas](#) and [Itad](#), created AVANTI – Advancing Knowledge for Agricultural Impact. AVANTI facilitated self-assessment of countries' results-based management (RBM) capacities in tracking Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the agricultural and rural development sectors. The initiative was implemented in 13 countries<sup>1</sup>. AVANTI's work in-country centred on the AG-Scan self-assessment methodology and aimed to strengthen government abilities to support evidence-based decision-making and reporting through monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL). This methodology was used to assess capacities across the following five pillars: Leadership, Evaluation and Monitoring, Accountability and Partnerships, Planning and Budgeting, and Statistics (LEAPS). These are summarised on the right.

L

## 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.

E

## EVALUATION AND ► MONITORING

How does the sector use monitoring and evaluation functions in decision making, management and accountability?

A

## ACCOUNTABILITY ► AND PARTNERSHIPS

Assessment of accountability and transparency by government to citizens and partners and vice versa.

P

## PLANNING ► AND BUDGETING

How does government use results for planning and budget formulation?

S

## STATISTICS ►

Supply, ability, and availability of data and information to feed into the decision-making process.

<sup>1</sup> Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Laos, Lesotho, Mozambique, Peru, Rwanda, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Vietnam

## AG-Scan Methodology

An AG-Scan is a six-step process that is aimed at identifying and addressing key RBM-related capacity gaps at national and sub-national levels. These steps are outlined in the diagram<sup>2</sup>.

This process identifies the areas to select for capacity development, which helps participating parties to prioritise areas for follow-up.



<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the AG-Scan methodology and the package of tools used to facilitate it, see the AG-Scan Implementer's Package for Results-Based Management Capacities Self-Assessment. <https://bit.ly/Implementers-Package>

# KEY OBSERVATIONS

AVANTI identified four areas of key learning throughout the initiative: the central role of data, leadership as a pivotal factor, the importance of financial targeting at the national and sub-national levels, and the behaviour change focus of the AG-Scan approach.

## ► The pivotal role of leadership

Effective leadership is an important driver for evidence generation, dissemination, and use – all of which are fundamental to RBM. Effective leadership creates a results and learning culture and shared ownership of the process. AVANTI's findings highlight the importance of leadership at different levels (district, regional, and national) and across institutions as a contributor to this progress. Chances for adopting evidence-based decision-making are higher when this behaviour is modelled by leaders in key positions.

## ► The central role of data

AVANTI's results affirmed how appropriate management and use of data are foundational for effective RBM. In addition, our work has highlighted two key categories of challenge that governments commonly face in this area: weak competency for data collection, processing, and packaging, and; lack of integrated data management systems when aggregating data from local to national levels, and beyond.

## ► The importance of financial targeting at national and sub-national levels

Government ownership of the development process is also essential to RBM. However, it cannot happen effectively when investment in data collection, data management, and data use is not directed at national governments. AVANTI found that much of the data collection, management, and use that takes place within a country is carried out by international actors, for international audiences. By targeting governments and their data systems, funders and national governments can support better coordination and harmonisation of their data management processes, thereby contributing to coherent and sustained approaches to agricultural and rural development.

## ► The behaviour change focus of the AG-Scan approach

The methodology associated with AG-Scan self-assessments can effect real behavioural changes on the part of key actors in the development process in a country. The AG-Scan approach is based on promoting the meaningful participation of a core group of government actors, as well as multi-stakeholder engagement. These two elements contribute to greater exchanges amongst them and to shared ownership, both of which are essential for more coherent and more sustainable development.

# The central role of data

AVANTI's results affirm how appropriate management and use of data are foundational for effective RBM. They have also uncovered some of the key challenges in getting this right.

Using reliable data to inform decision-making in agriculture and rural development is one of the most crucial elements influencing successful RBM. Policy makers have little basis for their decisions without understanding what is happening on the ground – often, this requires information based on reliable and timely data. Without this information, they cannot easily pursue any agenda, let alone one as complex as Agenda 2030 and its associated SDGs.

AVANTI's engagement and research with IFAD partners across different regions on this topic provided clear evidence of the importance of data to the RBM equation.

## Key challenges identified

Through our work, we identified the following five key challenges around the collection, management, and use of data:

### 1. Data collection

Limited resources and capacities on the part of national- and sub-national-level data collectors lead to serious information gaps. This lowers the potential to identify sectoral trends – as noted in an AVANTI e-panel on data quality in Africa and several AG-Scans, including Ghana, Peru, and Vietnam.

**Box 1** In the study [Trends in African Governments' Capacities to Generate and Utilise Agricultural Data](#) (hereafter Trends study), commissioned by AVANTI, it was noted that 25 out of 55 Member States either reported a score of zero or did not report at all for the indicator, "increasing country capacity for evidence-based planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation", in the 2021 biennial review (BR). Against this, there was a greater than 70% reduction in indicators for which no data was submitted between the first BR, in 2017, and the second, in 2019. This suggests that progress is being made but from a very low starting point.

### 2. Data harmonisation

There is a general lack of harmonisation of data within AVANTI countries. Even in contexts where data generation is relatively sound, such as Peru and Samoa, it is often conducted by a variety of stakeholders, e.g., private sector actors, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and local government. Differences in data collection methodologies and formats present coordination and aggregation challenges, creating difficulties in processing data for meaningful use. This is further compounded

by the multiplicity of purposes and audiences for which the data is generated – including donors, development practitioners, and government ministries. This creates serious issues of fragmentation and access for decision makers, who are most in need of the data.

### 3. Data aggregation

AVANTI's e-panels and AG-Scans in Ghana, Laos, Sierra Leone, and Vietnam observed a repeated lack of centralised databases, from which information on crop price, production, and the needs of various sector actors could be extracted. This provides a weak information base on which to shape agricultural policy.

### 4. Data quality

There appears to be a widespread lack of mechanisms to support the assessment of data quality and when data quality is compromised, user confidence and uptake is reduced. This concern was raised in Bolivia, Cameroon, Ghana, Laos, Lesotho, Mozambique, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Vietnam.

### 5. Data processing and use

A common theme across the AG-Scans was the sense that data was not processed in quantities or in formats that would be useful for decision makers. Without clear and concisely packaged communication products, decision makers cannot easily use evidence for their work, regardless of how relevant and compelling the evidence is. On the African continent, efforts are being made to bridge this gap. See Box 2, on the next page.

### Box 2 Awareness of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) BR process

The AVANTI Trends study indicated that regional economic development entities are engaging in national level outreach efforts to raise awareness about the CAADP BR process and to promote peer learning and multi-stakeholder collaboration around it. This should support capacity development throughout the data value chain.

### Box 3 Illustrating the complexity of the data landscape – the case of Ghana<sup>3</sup>

An example from Ghana provides useful food for thought concerning improving data collection and use. The country has pursued a number of innovations to strengthen its efforts at various levels, as follows:

- ▶ In 2018, Ghana completely changed how the government budget was built and spent, to monitor progress more effectively against the SDGs.
- ▶ Ghana is one of the first African strategic partners to adopt the structure of the UK's Sustainable Development website to share statistics related to SDG indicators.
- ▶ Ghana has created the Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation (MoM&E) to bolster the capacities and efforts of various ministries for monitoring and evaluation (M&E).
- ▶ The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) has created a standardised reporting format for all ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs).
- ▶ The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) has developed a standard template and reporting format for sector programme areas.

These developments at the national level are constrained by the insufficient resources devoted to data collection and management at the local level. To some extent, these issues are being addressed through efforts to digitise data collection and to promote the collaboration of key actors around results sharing. These key actors include development partners, the NDPC, Ghana Statistical Service, and MoM&E.

Ghana has made progress on data quality assessment. For example, there are now quarterly review sessions for M&E, and the Statistics, Research, and Information Directorate holds annual data validation sessions, using international standards. It has significant capacities to perform national household and key sectoral surveys. However, there is still no comprehensive framework for data quality assessment and there are inadequate resources for the regular data collection required to maintain up-to-date data, on which planning and budgeting can rely.

Issues around capacities link all of the above challenges; therefore, more RBM-related capacities need to be built, particularly at the sub-national levels of government. Even where capacities currently exist, funding is not made available in sufficient quantities to address bottlenecks (e.g., for data collection and data aggregation).

## Key takeaways for the future

AVANTI's results consistently point to the following three common needs across a range of countries

1

Substantial capacity development for nationally based data collectors, particularly around survey design and implementation and using digital tools for monitoring.

2

A shift in the positioning of data management from international actors and serving international clients, to national governments. This would substantially increase sector and country ownership of data management processes.

3

Capacity development for data managers in ministries to package results in ways that are readily communicated and useful to key decision makers for planning, steering, and accountability.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Ghana AG-Scan report, AVANTI



# The pivotal role of leadership

Leadership is an important driver for data generation, data sharing, and data use to enable RBM. It creates a results and learning culture and creates shared ownership across MDAs.

Efforts to improve agriculture and rural development sector capacities to strengthen RBM carry the risk of focusing too much on technical solutions. Of course, there are various important technical solutions to pursue (e.g., data collection tools and processes, database systems, etc.); however, without effective leadership, meaningful progress can easily stall.

This is because development plans, initiatives, and programmes that are designed to improve RBM, ultimately depend on people such as decision makers at different levels in government and in institutions supporting the pursuit of SDGs in a given country. The behaviour of such people in their respective working environments has a huge influence on the behaviour, motivation, and competence development of others who work with them.

Therefore, leadership is not only about recognising what needs to be achieved. In 10 of the 13 AG-Scans conducted, it was noted that senior officials understood

the importance of RBM in successfully pursuing SDGs. In several cases, this understanding was shared by many. However, the majority of the AG-Scan self-assessments revealed that effective leadership needs to be further developed. The biggest challenges to leaders' ability to foster the types of culture change needed for effective RBM are as follows:

- 1 An understanding and appreciation of what RBM implies does not permeate departments, ministries, or institutions of non-state actors (NSAs).
- 2 There is insufficient demand-driven action on the part of leaders (i.e., many leaders do not demonstrate to their colleagues at various levels that they use relevant data and information in their decision-making processes, or they do not require their direct reports to provide them with such data).

## What we have learned from the implementation of AVANTI

**Leaders should visibly and consistently communicate the importance of evidence-based decision-making, including the benefits of measuring and using results and evidence.** For example, the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture actively shared its experiences of SDG measurement with its counterparts in Bolivia and Honduras (not AVANTI countries), which was well received<sup>4</sup>. In Benin, the presidency introduced a national-level initiative to drive results and accountability, which saw the appointment of a minister in charge of planning and development, who

had a mandate to oversee the delivery of results. An accompanying national evaluation policy was enacted to institutionalise the results agenda and is currently under implementation. Not only is the government implementing the policy, but it is also evaluating and reviewing it to improve the weaknesses identified to date<sup>5</sup>.

**Leaders should create systems for generating and using evidence in decision-making within their organisations and should ensure that the public has access to data.** They should also request support for decisions

through updated, reliable, and meaningful data. For example, a ministry with a specific focus on M&E was established in Ghana to oversee and implement the results agenda, under the leadership of a cabinet-level minister. To operationalise the ministry's mandate, the government has set aside an annual budget to ensure that data are collected, analysed, and reported. The budget provides an accountability structure to track results and to communicate progress to the general population.

<sup>4</sup> Why leadership is the most important driver of a results and learning culture. AVANTI Lessons Learned Series 1. Available at <https://bit.ly/Leadership-in-RBM>

<sup>5</sup> Importance of leadership in RBM – Highlights on a recent e-Panel. Available at <https://bit.ly/Importance-Leadership-RBM>

## Key takeaways for the future

### **We observed more ownership and traction in elaborating and implementing the Action Plans (APs) when leaders were involved from the onset of the**

**AG-Scan process.** Evidence from Peru has shown that senior officials at the Ministry of Agriculture were very engaged in the AG-Scan, as they led the AP process and demonstrated a willingness to make the plan work, even after a complete change in the Ministry staff<sup>6</sup>. In Ghana, RBM pillar leaders formed a WhatsApp group to follow the AG-Scan process and coordinated their work regularly. The Government of Ghana funded some AG-Scan AP activities as a direct result of this positive coordination. Overall, more than 40% of the AP activities have been implemented to date<sup>7</sup>.

### **Having RBM champions in key positions can be pivotal in ensuring the ownership of data generation and use.**

The discussants at one of our e-panels on the importance of leadership in RBM<sup>8</sup> observed that RBM champions can emerge from senior- and medium-level managers. With adequate capacity across these levels of leadership, they work with other colleagues and act as the links between the technocrats responsible for delivery and the political leadership responsible for funding. In addition, where structures and systems are in place for anchoring data and evidence, champions can focus on these to ensure more meaningful data generation and use.

**It is important to engage with NSAs, such as CSOs, who can contribute much to data collection and can improve ownership and use at the country level.** Experiences from Benin, the Republic of South Africa, and Uganda have shown the role of leadership outside of government structures and systems in promoting a collective effort

by other NSAs in the agriculture and rural development sectors. CSOs collect a large amount of data at the local level and, given their contextual knowledge, they contribute to the availability of high-quality, reliable data, especially where there is capacity strengthening for such. Due to their closeness to communities and other primary stakeholders, they play a key role in ensuring the easier dissemination and comprehension of information at the local level. Engaging with NSAs requires building trust and partnerships between state and non-state players. Some good examples of leveraging networks within the broader sector were cited in Ghana. The Agriculture Sector Working Group (ASWG), in which M&E is a sub-group, includes state actors and NSAs. The Annual Joint Sector Reviews include different ASWGs and other stakeholders.

**It is important to build the capacity for data generation and use in governments by providing the tools and systems and the associated competence-building and training.** While government ministries in many countries generate a mass of data, there is often limited capacity to aggregate and convert this into readily available, shareable information, which can be used for decision-making. Additionally, data collection may not be well-targeted, therefore, it is less useful and meaningful. While international development organisations have the funding and capacity to generate information for decision-making, their priorities and agendas tend to limit country ownership and usability for governments and officials. Instead, they concentrate the necessary skills within their organisations. However, building the capacity of government officials will increase data ownership and data use for decision-making.

### **Box 4: Leadership in action – the cases of Rwanda and Bolivia<sup>9</sup>**

Having the support of senior leaders is crucial in generating motivation and commitment, but they cannot create such momentum on their own. Rwanda presents a good illustrative example of this, as follows:

- ▶ Political and MDA leaders, at both national and sub-national levels, understand and are actively and visibly committed to MEL, for example, through demanding and constructively using data and knowledge from MEL.
- ▶ Relevant MDA personnel – not only MEL professionals – appreciate the importance and utility of MEL and use the data and knowledge from MEL constructively in their work

**AG-Scan participants in Bolivia came to similar conclusions about leadership in their country context, noting the following:**

- ▶ Senior leaders at the Ministry of Rural Development and Lands and the Ministry of Environment and Water hold biweekly meetings to evaluate outcome indicators for decision-making.
- ▶ Programmes and projects have a clear RBM mandate, which is put into practice (in some cases, this is still under development).
- ▶ Sectoral agencies are fully committed to RBM.
- ▶ Most MDA staff support the government's initiative and try to practice RBM.

<sup>6</sup> Why leadership is the most important driver of a results and learning culture. AVANTI Lessons Learned Series 1. Available at <https://bit.ly/Leadership-in-RBM>

<sup>7</sup> AVANTI Barriers and Enablers Synthesis Report, July 2022. The URL is: <https://bit.ly/Enablers-and-Barriers-Study>

<sup>8</sup> Importance of leadership in RBM – Highlights on a recent e-Panel. Available at <https://bit.ly/Importance-Leadership-RBM>

<sup>9</sup> Sources: Bolivia and Rwanda AG-Scan reports, AVANTI



# The importance of financial targeting at national and sub-national levels

Targeting funding towards building capacity at national and sub-national levels can produce transformative results.

Insufficient funding for agricultural data systems and the agrifood industry is a chronic problem in Africa. However, if the existing funding – from both state actors and NSAs – was better targeted, it would generate the potential for transformational results in data ownership, use, and sustainability. The Trends study cited above provides insights on how existing funding – meagre though it may be, relative to demand – can be better channelled to build

capacities at national and sub-national levels. The study focused on the CAADP's BR, which was the main tool that was used to track the progress of the African Union (AU) Member States in implementing the 2014 Malabo Declaration for mutual accountability. The BR entailed data generation, compilation, and assessment, and the utilisation of the assessments' results for increased agricultural productivity and improved livelihoods.

## What we learned from the study on trends in African governments' capacities to generate and use agricultural data

**Donor investments in international and regional data institutions are proportionately higher than their investments in national and sub-national government data systems – where it is needed the most.**

International intermediary institutions spend huge sums of NSA funding at the expense of long-term and sustainable investment in government data systems. Figure 1 presents the institutions funded by international donors to support the CAADP BR process. Key informant interviews reported that regional and continental investments are disproportionately higher than country-level investments. Although the study did not substantiate this claim by extending its inquiry to the amount of funding and financial investments in these institutions, we can infer this from the sheer number of organisations funded, relative to the shortage of data that have been generated by governments at national and sub-national levels. This is triangulated by the limited donor investments directly targeting national governments in African countries.

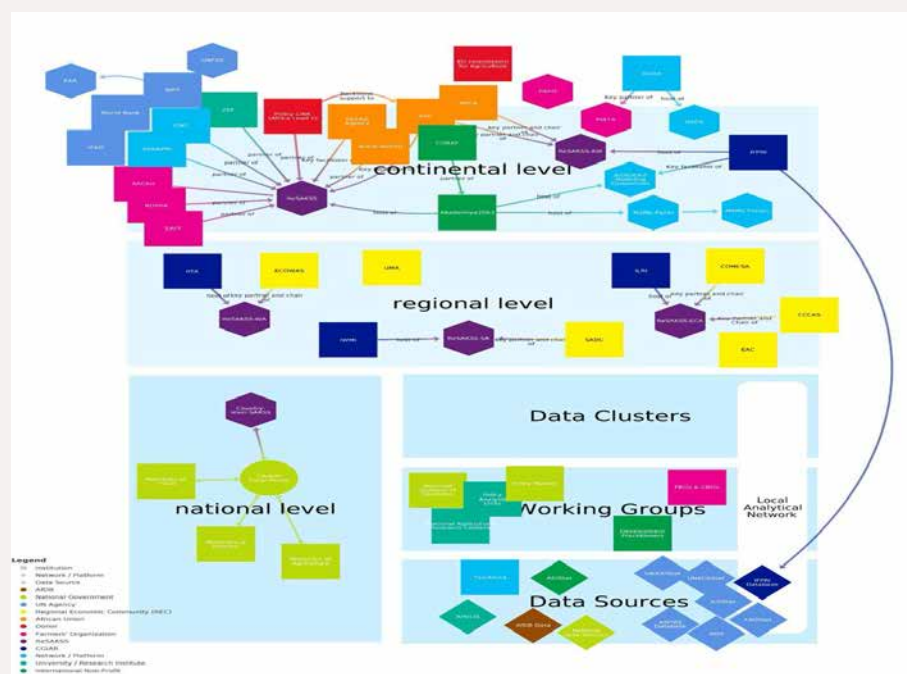


Figure 1: CAADP BR Process – Actor Map

Source: AVANTI Trends Study <https://bit.ly/Trends-Africa-Data>

International development efforts towards RBM will remain unsustainable and compromised without further investment in government data systems. Enhancing local ownership is crucial for evidence-based decision-making at the local level.

**The lack of investment by national governments exacerbates the disproportionate influence of international funding.** CAADP processes remain largely driven by donors and AU institutions, with minimal financial support from Member States, the private sector, or civil society. International donors are inadvertently playing an outsized role in influencing initiatives. Different coalitions of agencies promote multiple continental agrifood data processes, which leads to duplication and uncoordinated data analysis and dissemination. It also undermines the role of national governments in holding stakeholders to account, not just for data generation, but also for initiatives at the national level. Because most donor initiatives are predetermined at headquarter level before being rolled out in-country, misalignment is created with national and continental agricultural strategies and the associated data needs. This is an issue that AVANTI has attempted to address through the AG-Scan process. This speaks to the need for national governments to take the investment gap more seriously and to direct substantial resources towards strengthening capacities in data generation and use. Doing this would also help them to advocate for a similar redirection on the part of NSAs.

**The dominance of NSAs in the generation and utilisation of data compromises the accountability and ownership required for sustainable evidence generation and use.** Current data systems for CAADP draw on the existing donor-driven processes, which are dominated by UN agencies, such as the World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Study - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA), and The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Agricultural Integrated Survey (AGRISurvey). While these are useful sources of information, data collection processes are not necessarily in sync with the CAADP BR, meaning that data generation is neither aligned to the national response and need, nor generated in time to inform decision-making. Furthermore, the nature

of the development aid system's short-term funding cycles is incompatible with long-term investment in strategic data generation and use. The stop-start nature of development initiatives results in the loss of gains, lessons, and the momentum accrued. These losses, when combined, account for huge losses in years of investment in financial and human resource input by state and non-state actors. This lack of continuity and information-sharing between projects that are funded by international actors at the national level limits the opportunities for learning across the continent. Institutions supporting CAADP are weakened by "drip-feed" funding, which is spread across institutions and not strategically allocated. One key informant commented:

***'The role of international donors needs to be redefined on African terms - the AU and their partners are not beggars; they have a strategy; donors should align with it and prioritise pooled funding.'*** (Ghana AG-Scan)

The inherent power dynamics between funders and recipients, among other things, limits the ability of governments to hold the international development community to account. Instead, it shifts power away from governments, who should rightfully have the mandate for sector-level data generation and use. In the first instance, governments should be the main custodians and funders of data. As highlighted in most of the 13 AG-Scan countries, the aim is mutual accountability for sector performance between the state and NSAs. That said, the motivation for data generation should go beyond accountability, to informing decision-making (primarily for populations), generating learning, and improving performance. As cited in a 2020 e-panel<sup>10</sup> hosted by AVANTI, there is a need to move from *'donor emphasis on compliance and accountability to learning and improving performance.'*

<sup>10</sup> AVANTI & EvalForward e-Panel: How to improve results in the agriculture sector: a discussion on leadership and RBM in Africa. <https://bit.ly/Improve-Results-Africa>



## Key takeaways for future action

- ▶ Most of the AG-Scan workshops considered how to ensure mutual accountability between state and non-state actors. Quite rightly, national governments account for donor funds and hold the mandate for data generation and use – even though they may not have adequate means to finance its generation and dissemination. These discussions provide the foundation for future thinking on how innovations can be channelled to reinforce existing government initiatives, instead of working tangentially. In this digital age and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, such responsive innovations are much needed.
- ▶ Furthermore, how can the donor community be incentivised to directly invest more in government capacities and direct investments towards local data systems such as CAADP? How can the international development community truly embrace the localisation of data systems and support capacities at the national and sub-national levels, factoring in country needs rather than donor-driven agendas?
- ▶ One of AVANTI's key strengths was convening different in-country sectors to co-create an Action Plan for RBM, which was grounded in the national context and driven by immediate government priorities, with government representatives leading and the private sector, development actors, and academia following. Such an approach has proven to be empowering, relevant, and sustainable.

# The behaviour change focus of the AG-scan approach

The AG-Scan approach is built on the understanding that meaningful participation in self-assessment and action planning leads to increased ownership and motivation. This, in turn, promotes improved knowledge-sharing and evidence-based action through multi-stakeholder engagement.

The AG-Scan methodology at the core of AVANTI's work has three main components: a context and stakeholder analysis and a trust-building process (customisation), a self-assessment workshop on existing RBM capacities and gaps (analysis), and the creation of an AP for further follow-up (implementation). All of these steps are facilitated by a small team of people, who bring contextual and methodological knowledge together. A typical team would be composed of a Government Coordination Person or persons; a consultant, who is intimately familiar with the national context; and an AG-Scan methodological

expert, who can support the process. This helps to ensure that the national context and the interests of the key ministry or ministries are fully incorporated into the process of customising the AG-Scan tools and focus. Added to this, is the effort to bring in key actors from various MDAs (e.g., national statistics and the Ministry of Finance) and NSAs (donors and civil society organisations) to create a group that is representative of the main actors involved in the pursuit of the SDGs, in the national context.

## What we have learned from the implementation of AVANTI

**Engaging the right people enables a level of reflection and collaboration that incorporates different perspectives and promotes shared ownership.**

Identifying champions within key institutions is a crucial feature of the context analysis. These champions are needed to help carry the process forward and to ensure high-level buy-in and the participation of a wide range of stakeholders across departments, ministries, and external partners (e.g., donors, CSOs, and private sector actors). Interviews with government representatives, other national stakeholders, and donors are important in harvesting perspectives and opinions, information on ongoing initiatives and projects, and in discussing the possible contributions and ways of engagement in the AG-Scan. Tailoring the AG-Scan regarding scope, needs, and participants to each country context makes it more relevant and interesting to the Ministry of Agriculture and allied

rural development specialists. Having the relevant ministry at the forefront of formulating the workshop's objectives and programme, sending out invitations, and deciding on the contributions and participants reinforces its lead role in the process.

**The right timing of the AG-Scan process and its alignment with funders' planning processes can facilitate resource mobilisation.**

When feasible, it is better to wait for a positive alignment of actors and situational factors than to forge ahead just because an AG-Scan is scheduled. This certainly applies to the customisation stage, but it is also important throughout the process. Thus, each AG-Scan needs to consider the following:

- ▶ Relevant government initiatives and planning processes (e.g., sector strategies and development plans). Here, the considerations are two-fold: first, to avoid competition between the AG-Scan and

important planning processes, and second, to seek opportunities for mutual reinforcement as AG-Scan results can feed into such plans.

- ▶ Political processes, such as elections, can absorb much of the key actors' attention. Political instability (either at a societal level or in terms of the security of tenure of senior government personnel) can undermine an AG-Scan and its follow-up. These processes need to be respected as much as possible.
- ▶ The stage of the relevant funding mechanism for the AG-Scan (e.g., a donor funding programme). The AP coming out of an AG-Scan has increased chances of funding if it can feed into such a programme at an early stage.

**The AG-Scan self-assessment workshop contributes to building trust across different stakeholders, improving collaboration and coordination, and identifying innovative ways to strengthen SDG monitoring, reporting, and knowledge-sharing capacities.**

The AG-Scan facilitation team and its governmental counterparts use the self-assessment workshop to continue to build the trust established in the early stages, as a variety of stakeholders and targeted institutions have intensive discussions, which are not part of their day-to-day interactions. This is an essential enabler of the information that needs to be shared openly between the ministries, AG-Scan funders, and the AG-Scan implementing team to maximise its potential benefits. The more familiar the AG-Scan facilitators are with their counterparts in the country, the easier it is to raise awareness and to find support for the initiative within the relevant ministries<sup>10</sup>.

**The AG-Scan self-assessment workshop is a key moment in the process. Here, facilitators have the following responsibilities:**

- ▶ Assemble an effective mix of participants (in terms of level, institutional representation, and diversity).
- ▶ Create a safe environment for learning and reflection.
- ▶ Refine methodologies for exchange, discussion, and collective decision-making, which allow for the following:
  - ▶ Development of a solid sense of ownership on the part of key actors.
  - ▶ Engagement in the further development of the resulting AP.
  - ▶ Taking responsibility and making real commitments to pursue the collective agenda.

The participants in most countries welcomed the unique opportunity for stakeholders working on the same SDGs to come together to discuss how their separate strategies contribute to one vision. The workshops opened spaces for the stakeholders to inform or update each other on SDG monitoring activities and strategies across the sector and between organisations. Blending political, strategic, and technical discussions, breaking up hierarchies, and offering a platform for champions in different sectors enriches discussions and widens the range of potential proposals for future collaboration. Furthermore, it also allows the stakeholders to understand different perspectives and to identify innovative ways to strengthen capacities for SDG monitoring, reporting, and knowledge-sharing more broadly.

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***“It felt like a therapy.”***

(Tunisia AG-Scan – Statistics division of the Ministry of Agriculture)

***“...workshops explicitly focused on M&E in the agriculture sector are rare and... much needed...”***

(Samoa AG-Scan)

***“The most important thing I’ve learned in the workshop is the need to align MoFA activities and reports to the Statistics Service of Ghana.”***

(Ghana AG-Scan)

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In the action planning phase of the AG-Scan, participants lay the foundation for the next steps, including prioritising areas of concern and identifying concrete activities and commitments from the different actors to show the way forward. The AP and its approval can be instrumental for advocacy,

the promotion of governmental engagement, and for engagement with potential funders in the country. The quality and feasibility of a proposed plan can be increased significantly when it is further developed and detailed through a collectively defined process. Working groups – which focus, for example, on the actions needed to improve specific RBM pillars; on the organisation of events, such as webinars on sharing the knowledge of specific sectors; or on the provision of support, such as inter-ministerial training on statistics – are some ways in which momentum can be maintained post-AG-Scan. Working with key thematic areas of national interest – such as nutrition, climate change, gender equality, and youth employment – can also help to reduce the complexity of SDG reporting by focusing energy more narrowly on priority topics, making monitoring more actionable and useful.

**The AG-Scan methodology and process have the potential to address systemic issues by stimulating changes in the behaviour and culture of key stakeholders.**

Along with the participatory approach, the collective identification of the main focus areas can trigger follow-up actions, such as the facilitation of knowledge events (e.g., the regional dialogue that took place in Peru and Bolivia) or the repetition of an AG-Scan (Lesotho) after some years, or after the decentralisation of the AG-Scan process (Peru). These various elements can stimulate changes in behaviour and organisational culture, which should improve ways of working, which has been welcomed – particularly by the younger generation.

<sup>10</sup> For example, this is strongly supported by AVANTI experiences in countries with Helvetas programme offices versus those that did not have them. In the former case, AG-Scan Leads could tap into existing networks to identify key counterparts to co-develop the AG-Scan process, helping to smooth the early stages of the process.





## Key takeaways for future action

- ▶ The relative uniqueness of AVANTI's participatory approach has been well-received across AVANTI AG-Scan countries. The potential for improved RBM through more inter-agency and inter-stakeholder exchanges has also been widely recognised. However, there has been difficulty in moving from the first APs to more well-defined, resourced, and implemented ones (borne out by a relatively low rate of full AP implementation in AG-Scan countries). This points to the need to sustain the facilitation of the process through action planning and eventual implementation, something that was not part of initial AVANTI thinking.
- ▶ An equally important goal to strive for is to link AP follow-up closely with existing/emerging plans and initiatives (e.g., sectoral and national development plans, special initiatives, and the harmonisation of different donors). This avoids unnecessary competition and can tap into the energy and commitment driving those initiatives to mutually reinforce them.
- ▶ Finally, APs can be used as advocacy tools, providing evidence of shared thinking around key challenges and new ideas on how to confront them.



# CONCLUSION

**Although many of the challenges and solutions described above are not new, the AVANTI experience supports the view that moving towards results- or evidence-based decision-making and working requires certain technical capacities along the data-to-information value chain, as well as behavioural and institutional culture capacities, which are essential to transformation.**

It is clear that many of the challenges faced in different countries (e.g., the design and delivery of surveys, data quality assessment, harmonisation, and management) require competence development, especially at sub-national levels, for MDAs and NSAs who are responsible for various aspects of data collection and management. It is equally clear that, over the years, a much greater investment in such competencies has been made in international development actors – at global and regional levels in the data space – than has been made in national state actors.

This is why redirecting financing is so important in improving RBM capacities in a wide variety of countries, particularly in Africa. There is not a lack of resources, but, rather, the existing resources (from both governments and donors) need to be more strategically used to boost key capacities sustainably.

This report also emphasises the importance of leadership in enabling evidence-based planning, budgeting, and implementation. From an institutional perspective, such leadership needs to be present

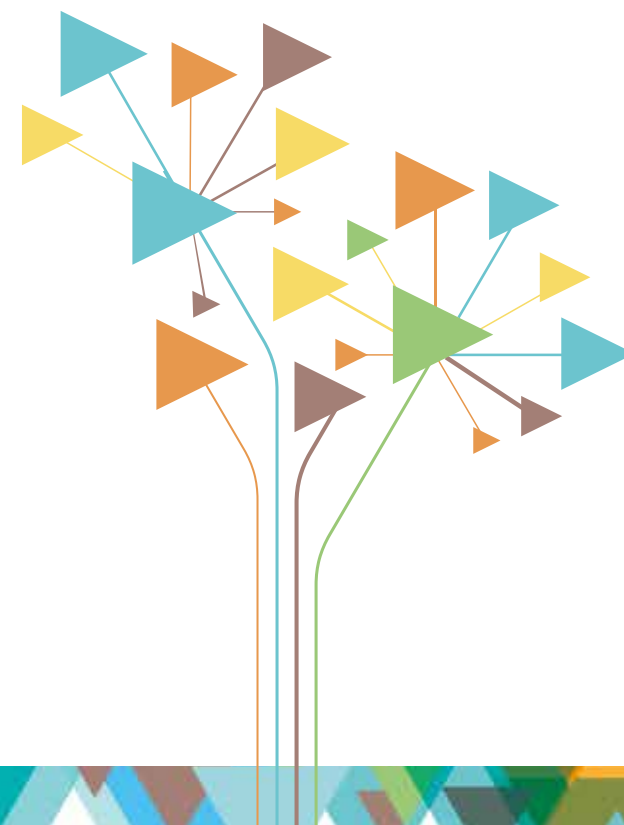
at various levels to model and promote the types of collaboration needed for a truly RBM approach to be successful. This is not something that can be addressed simply as a training requirement, because it is about individual behaviour and institutional culture. It is, therefore, more of an ongoing pursuit, where opportunities to strengthen collaboration (often with the added benefit of increased capacities) need to be taken up by those who are well-placed to influence others, and commitments need to be made across departments, ministries, and other key institutions so that they can work together towards common goals.

Finally, the AG-Scan methodology itself combines a review of the key dimensions related to results- and evidence-based decision-making (through the self-assessment process), with a highly participatory approach to increase stakeholders' ownership of the resulting follow-up. The level of engagement that AG-Scan facilitators have in the post-workshop process has been limited in the case of AVANTI. The experience gained through the 13 AG-Scan countries has shown that integrating the AG-Scan results into future sectoral and wider initiatives without such engagement is a challenge.

Thus, a key recommendation that has arisen from the AVANTI experience of the AG-Scan approach, is that when AG-Scans are designed and implemented, there needs to be a significant level of post-self-assessment workshop engagement by facilitators. This will increase opportunities to identify points of entry for the AG-Scan recommendations to be taken up. Another key recommendation is about resourcing

the implementation of the APs generated during the AG-Scan process. This includes financial and human resources from across the sector, including redirecting donor funds from regional levels to national and sub-national levels – where they are needed the most.

It is hoped that this summary of the AVANTI experience contributes to continuing dialogues around RBM and evidence-based decision-making, as well as to the continuing pursuit of the SDGs.









## Abbreviations

AGRISurvey	Agricultural Integrated Survey Programme (FAO)
AP	Action Plan
ASWG	Agriculture Sector Working Group
AU	African Union
AVANTI	Advancing Knowledge for Agricultural Impact
BR	Biennial Review
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme
COSOP	Country Strategic Opportunities Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
LSMS-ISA	Living Standards Measurement Study - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
MoFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
MoM&E	Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
NSA	Non-state actor
RBM	Results-based management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

Along with this document, a wide variety of additional resources published through the AVANTI initiative are available here: <https://bit.ly/Avanti-Publications>

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