



AVANTI Barriers and Enablers Study

Assessing the uptake and implementation of AG-Scan action plans post-workshops in Bolivia, Cameroon, Ghana, Peru, Samoa, and Vietnam

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Acronyms

AEA	Agricultural Extension Agents
AP	Action Plan
ASCD	Agriculture Sector Coordination Division
ASWAG	Agriculture Sector Working Group
AVANTI	Advancing Knowledge for Agricultural Impact
DARD	Director of Agriculture and Rural Development
DDA	District Directors of Agriculture
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GCP	Government Coordination Person
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
JSR	Joint Sector Review
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Samoa)
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Vietnam)
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MINADER	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Cameroon)
MIS	Management Information System
MoFA	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Ghana)
MRC	Medical Research Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PADFA	Commodity Value Chain Development Support Project
PPD	Project and Planning Department
PPMED	Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Division

RBM	Results-based management
RDA	Regional Directors of Agriculture
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToR	Terms of Reference

Introduction

Overview

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) funded AVANTI via an initial three-year grant, with two 12-month extensions, from 2018 to 2022. The initiative supported the self-assessment of country monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and capacities in the agriculture and rural development sectors through 'AG-Scans'. The AG-Scan is a structured, facilitated process that enables government and other stakeholders to analyze the status of their capacities in results-based management (RBM) - results and M&E activities, and develop an action plan to close gaps and improve performance. The AG-Scan uses a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) lens to contribute to deepening the measurement of results to demonstrate the impact of programming.

The goal of AVANTI was to contribute to the evidence-based design and implementation of policies and programmes by improving the measurability of progress toward SDG targets related to agriculture. The main objective was to understand the strengths, shortcomings, and solutions for better RBM and promote engagement in implementing concrete and resourced action plans (APs) to improve the agriculture and rural development sectors measurement, analysis, management, and communication of SDG results. At the core of the RBM system are monitoring and evaluation, but it also includes system components such as planning for results, learning from results, applying that learning, and the enabling environment for M&E.

AVANTI worked with ministries responsible for agriculture, as well as those charged with reviewing and monitoring SDG progress. Other ministries and agencies with responsibility for rural development were also involved. Knowledge generation and sharing within and between countries was also an aspect of the AVANTI global programme.

AVANTI undertook AG-Scan self-assessments in thirteen countries: Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Laos, Lesotho, Mozambique, Peru, Rwanda, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Vietnam. The AG-Scan is a facilitated process for an in-depth reflection around the agricultural and rural development sectors' capacities for Results Based Management (RBM) of specific countries; and to measure the sectors' achievements against the SDGs. The assessment explores five broad areas, referred to as 'pillars'. These include: Pillar 1: Leadership; Pillar 2: Evaluation and Monitoring; Pillar 3: Accountability and Partnership; Pillar 4: Planning and Budgeting; and Pillar 5: Statistics.

Funding of post-AG-Scan action plans was not part of AVANTI's core objectives. However, the AG-Scan process was expected to identify and link to funding sources. Furthermore, each country was expected to lead in resourcing their action plans and ensuring implementation according to the plan's objectives and timelines.

Background to the Study

An area of interest emerging from AVANTI has been the variation in levels of uptake of RBM across different contexts. Through research, we sought to understand the factors for and

against the uptake of the action plans by reviewing existing AVANTI documentation and primary data collection. A cross-cutting theme was an attempt to explore the barriers and enablers to how the initiative has generated and collated knowledge, how this has been shared with stakeholders to enhance the uptake of RBM practices and how the ministries involved are actively seeking to instill a learning culture.

Study purpose

The overarching aim of this study was to assess the level/extent of implementation of the AG-Scan Action Plans post-workshop. Specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Assess progress to date on AG-Scan action plan implementation.
2. Identify, document, and elaborate on the barriers to the elaboration and ownership of the AG-Scan action plans in participating countries.
3. Identify, document, and elaborate on the enablers of the smooth implementation of AG-Scan action plans.
4. Identify, document, and elaborate on the barriers to the smooth implementation of AG-Scan action plans.
5. Identify specific lessons learned from the implementation or lack of performance of the AG-Scan action plans.
6. Make recommendations to help improve the ownership, elaboration, and implementation of the action plans.

Study scope

The countries included in this study were Bolivia, Cameroon, Ghana, Peru, Samoa, and Vietnam. It has sought to determine how the action plans have been implemented and identify factors contributing to smooth implementation. The study's target group were persons responsible for or with influence or knowledge on follow-up support. These included national-level AG-Scan participants, AG-Scan implementers, and supporters of RBM in the countries' agricultural sector, including IFAD counterparts in-country. The country sample allowed for appreciation of the countries where action plan implementation has proceeded well or where there has been relative inaction and the related influencing factors.

Methods

Study design

The design for the AG-Scan barriers and enablers study was primarily qualitative. Conducting stakeholder interviews was preferred as it is considered a standard method in evaluation processes outlined by the Medical Research Council (MRC) framework. Interviews enabled us to 'capture emerging changes in implementation, experiences of the intervention, and unanticipated or complex causal pathways'.¹ Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus groups to provide a thorough appreciation of how the programme has been implemented, focusing on understanding the key enablers and barriers arising from the same. The study team used an inductive evaluation approach and attempted to make sense of the contextual factors without imposing pre-determined expectations on the subject under inquiry. Ultimately, the process was considered holistic because it was assumed that the whole is understood as a complex system greater than the sum of its parts.²

Participants

At the time of this study, AG-Scans had been conducted in ten countries, Bolivia, Cameroon, Ghana, Lesotho, Peru, Rwanda, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Vietnam. A subset of these countries was intentionally selected to include those that had reported positive progress in implementation and those that had faced challenges. Six countries were ultimately selected and participated in this study: Bolivia, Cameroon, Ghana, Peru, Samoa, and Vietnam. In-country consultants were tasked with preparing a list of stakeholders and arranging a session to discuss barriers and enablers. Others were also invited to participate in key informant interviews (KIIs) based on their availability and relative knowledge of the AVANTI programme.

Interviewees were purposely identified based on their knowledge and experience of the AVANTI programme and their availability and willingness to participate in the study. A total of 27 were ultimately interviewed through in-depth interviews or focus group discussions (FGDs). Participants included Principal Monitoring & Evaluation Officers, AVANTI Focal persons, Technical Officers, Policy Officers, and Government Coordinating Persons identified during AG-Scan processes. Purposive sampling was used in line with the study's objective to gain further insights and experience from various experts with different levels of involvement with AVANTI. In addition, some participants were either currently or previously engaged in a direct role in implementing or supporting the AP implementation and in a suitable position to help build temporal layers of knowledge and insight into relevant processes.

¹ Moore GF, Audrey S, Barker M, Bond L, Bonell C, Hardeman W, et al. Process evaluation of complex interventions: Medical Research Council guidance. *BMJ*. 2015;350:h1258.

² Thomas DR. A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *Am J Eval*. 2006;27:237-46.

Data collection

The study utilized semi-structured interview topic guides that allowed interviewers to probe, ask follow-up questions and, at the same time, flexibly follow through with specific topics or themes that emerged from discussions.³ The questions were developed in consultation with the teams at Itad and Helvetas. We also conducted an exhaustive review of available documentation and meetings with the group assigned to work on the study. A sample topic guide for interviews is attached as Appendix 1. All the interviews and focus groups were conducted online between 23rd March and 19th May 2022. The interviews were conducted at times that were most convenient to the participants. The final number of participants in FGDs and KIIs was 19, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of participants for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions

Country	Key informant interviewees	Focus group participants
Bolivia	4	0
Cameroon	0	7
Ghana	0	7
Peru	4	0
Samoa	4	0
Vietnam	1	0
Total	13	14

Informed verbal consent was obtained before commencing focus groups and interviews. All were audio-recorded and lasted an average of 45 minutes for in-depth discussions and one and half hours for focus groups. A professional note-taker compiled notes after each interview or focus group. They shared these notes with key people or respondents to validate the content. Given the importance of confidentiality in research,⁴ participants were made aware that, where possible, identifiable information would be anonymized.

Data analysis

We used thematic analysis to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report key themes from the data we collected⁵. Whilst offering a highly flexible approach, thematic analysis facilitates the generation of a rich and detailed yet complex data account.⁶ We imported data from the notes into the ATLAS.ti version 9 software package. We developed codes based on familiarization with the primary data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among

³ Bernard HR. Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches. 4th ed. Oxford: Altamira; 2011.

⁴ Moore GF, Audrey S, Barker M, Bond L, Bonell C, Hardeman W, et al. Process evaluation of complex interventions: Medical Research Council guidance. *BMJ*. 2015;350:h1258.

⁵ Nowell LS, Norris JM, White DE, Moules NJ. Thematic analysis: striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *Int J Qual Methods*. 2017;16:1609406917733847.

⁶ Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol*. 2006;3:77-101.

codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analyses⁷. Identified themes were discussed with other team members for analysis and final write-up of the report.

Study limitations

In this study, we included a subset of all the countries which had undertaken AG-Scan self-assessments (n=6/10) and did not include all the countries. Given the uniqueness of each context, there is a high risk of losing some of the key elements in the countries that were not included in the study. However, it is appreciated that qualitative studies generally have much smaller samples than those used in quantitative studies, especially considering the aim of qualitative enquiry, which is primarily to gather rich, detailed information.⁸ The research team faced the following limitations during the implementation of this study:

1. **COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on face-to-face interactions.** The research team had a flexible approach for face-to-face interactions in the selected countries, given COVID-19 restrictions. For example, in some countries, participants met for an FGD with remote facilitation (e.g., Ghana and Cameroon), while remote in-depth interviews were conducted in others (e.g., in Vietnam and Samoa).
2. **Challenges accessing stakeholders.** Given the high levels of staff turnover and government changes within targeted ministries and other agencies in the AG-Scan case study countries, it was hard to identify relevant stakeholders involved from the start of AVANTI. The research team onboarded in-country experts to support relevant stakeholder selection to mitigate this issue. A significant number of the in-country experts were involved in the AG-Scan workshops conducted in 2018 and 2019.
3. **Information recall bias.** Since AG-Scan workshops happened two to three years ago, stakeholders sometimes found it challenging to recall and provide requested information.
4. **Stakeholder perceptions bias.** The research team asked stakeholders about changes they observed and their opinions about the progress made with the post-AG-Scan action plans. One challenge was that interviewees might tell the researchers what they think they wanted to hear, or they might not know the cause of change. The research team addressed this challenge by: (i) defining in advance expected outcomes, (ii) incorporating data triangulations, and (iii) highlighting that this research was a learning exercise and criticism would turn into programme improvements.
5. **Remote data collection challenges.** Barriers faced by the research team included developing rapport and trust with the stakeholders interviewed online, network reliability, time differences, and meeting cancellations.

⁷ Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol.* 2006;3:77–101.

⁸ Sandelowski M. Sample size in qualitative research. *Res Nurs Health.* 1995;18:179–83.

Results and findings

Status of implementation

An AG-Scan workshop in Vietnam was held in September 2019, but the AP has not been finalized. An AG-Scan workshop in Bolivia was held in August 2019, with an AP produced. AG-Scan workshops were held in Peru in September 2018 and in Samoa in February 2019 – both with APs produced. However, since the workshop and AP finalization, no further work has been conducted in Bolivia, Peru or Samoa. In Cameroon and Ghana, AG-Scan workshops were conducted in 2019. Both produced APs, and there has been some progress in their implementation. In Cameroon, for example, the first activities implemented were those included in the capacity building section of the AP. Five out of 10 regions have already benefited from capacity building activities, and some results are visible; for example, those who attended the training have delivered better quality documents/reports. In Ghana, approximately 45% of the AP has been implemented.

Key barriers and enablers

The consultations generated 16 unique factors operating as barriers or enablers to implementing the AG-Scan APs in the focus countries. These factors have been categorized under four main domains: contextual factors, institutional or organizational factors, implementation processes, and resources. While several identified factors operated as barriers to the implementation of the AG-Scan APs, some were enablers, and others overlapped the two. See Figure 1 for a summary of key themes drawn from the study.



Figure 1: Summary of barriers and facilitators

Contextual factors

Alignment, fit and potential for integration

Having APs aligned to government priorities is seen as a positive enabler to their implementation because the plans can be integrated into district and national plans and get funding from other planned government activities. In Cameroon, for example, some activities such as training have become an integral part of district-level Annual Workplans. AP activities have been integrated as part of the activities that the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural

Development (MINADER) implements to improve their RBM systems and processes and enable staff to acquire skills to enhance their day-to-day activities.

In Ghana, many AP activities are aligned to and could be funded by mainstream Government of Ghana (GoG) activities. There have been some capacity building activities; M&E officers have been trained to undertake effective M&E and manage project data efficiently using Management Information Systems (MIS) and on data analytical tools to enhance effective evidence-based decision making. Other ongoing activities include RBM training for key staff such as Agricultural Extension Agents (AEAs), MIS Officers, District Directors of Agriculture (DDAs), and Regional Directors of Agriculture (RDAs) at district and regional levels. This training forms an integral part of the district-level Annual Workplans but is woefully inadequate due to limited resources. Due to the alignment of the AP to government activities, a recurrent activity since the AP was produced is the annual Joint Sector Review (JSR) meetings with stakeholders at the national/regional level.

In Vietnam, a detailed post-AG-Scan AP has not been developed or finalized. It is worth noting that in April 2018 (pre-AG-Scan workshop), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) developed the 'Action Plan for Agenda 2030 toward sustainable agricultural and rural development', which contains Vietnam's five to 10-year vision. It was expected that the AG-Scan AP would feed into Agenda 2030 plan to ensure implementation. However, there was a feeling among stakeholders that the adjustments to 2030 agenda AP were not possible only 1 or 2 years after approval, hence no post AG Scan workshop AP was developed. Some respondents to the study actually believe that the 2030 agenda AP in place is good enough for them to continue their work and therefore there is no need to change or update the current action plan as yet.

In Samoa, there haven't been any further actions following the finalization of the Action Plan. It was, however, felt that there would be a need to review the plan to recheck alignment and enable better integration into existing government activities. This is borne from the need for the post-AG-Scan AP to complement and fill the gaps in the Agriculture Sector Plan and to enable funding. At the time of finalizing the AG-Scan AP, the Agriculture Sector Plan was also under development (in the finalization stage to replace one ending in 2020, however, at the time of writing, it was still under development).

Like Samoa, there have been no further actions on the APs in Bolivia and Peru. In Bolivia, the social and political conflicts that began immediately after the elections in October 2019 were a major barrier and prevented further action. New government management was put in place, which changed all the authorities and technicians of the previous government with whom AVANTI had worked. Because of this scenario, the AP was not submitted to the anchor agency, the Ministry of Rural Development and Lands.

Leadership, buy-in and ownership

Respondents agreed that if the leadership is not actively or fully involved during the training and planning of activities, uptake would be compromised – hence, there is neither buy-in nor ownership. In Cameroon, having a designated government coordinator was a success factor.

The respondent observed that designating a government coordinator was key to ensuring the success of the finalization of the AP. This process also included appointing a responsible person for each of the five pillars (core group). Samoa had also allocated a specific department to anchor the AP implementation. This was very important given the need for multi-stakeholder engagement as part of the AP implementation and to share key aspects with people at various levels. Leadership, buy-in and ownership can also influence resource allocation, either positively or negatively. In Peru, the approval and implementation of the AP has been entrusted to the General Directorate of Policy Monitoring and Evaluation, with the support of the Planning Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. To date, however, the AP has not been implemented.

Perceptions of the need, adaptability, and benefits of the AVANTI programme

The way in which participants positively embrace the programme (based on their perception of benefits and utility within the given context) is very important in ensuring the successful implementation of the AP. This underscores the fact that the processes for trust-building and facilitation are key to the AVANTI approach (and success). In Cameroon, a respondent identified how they have used the skills they gained on RBM operationalization. Five out of 10 regions have benefited from capacity building activities, and some results are already visible; for example, those who attended training deliver better quality documents and reports. Respondents observed that stakeholders involved in the process or who have received training are very satisfied with the results. In addition, the implementation of the AP activities, more specifically the capacity building, has helped Management Controllers understand the budget and programming environment and the need to monitor programmes.

In Ghana, the perception of sustainability was highlighted as a positive factor. Positive feedback from Samoa on the value of the AG-Scan AP as a *“great guide for the division to consider during the development of the new Agriculture Sector Plan”*.

Positive evaluation of the workshop by Samoa participants confirmed that *“the AG-Scan tool is very useful for project implementation processes, but it can also be used in different areas/sectors”*. A key informant in Samoa felt it was especially useful for monitoring purposes.

The effects of COVID-19

A few respondents highlighted how activities in Cameroon were delayed due to COVID-19, where capacity building sessions were impacted by response measures that limited gatherings. Travel restrictions were highlighted in both KIIs and FGDs. In Samoa, COVID-19 (and the emergence of measles as well) delayed the development of the new Agriculture sector plan, thus causing *“delays to the validation and implementation of the post AG-Scan AP”*. In essence, due to COVID-19 and measles outbreaks, among other things, the Agriculture Sector Plan is still under development at the time of writing, and none of the post-AG-Scan activities have been implemented. A key informant in Samoa agreed and emphasized that *“the last three years have been exceptionally uncertain with delays mainly caused by competing priorities due to the measles outbreak and COVID-19 lockdowns”*. In Bolivia and Peru, it was observed that the restrictive measures occasioned by the strict quarantine imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic,

particularly in 2020, prevented adequate follow-up actions in relation to the APs. There was no mention of COVID-19 as a barrier in Ghana and Vietnam.

Institutional and organizational factors

Coordination and synergies

A key theme highlighted by several respondents was the need for coordination and synergies in the planning and delivery of APs. Stakeholders from Vietnam, Samoa and Ghana highlighted several coordination gaps in AP delivery. In Vietnam, there was a lack of uniformity among policy priorities, sectoral development strategies and financial allocations for SDGs. There was a feeling of a lack of mechanisms for smooth cooperation and a sense of shared responsibilities, hence, some level of dysfunction. Within MARD, there are several non-AG-Scan APs that each department implements, including the Green Growth AP (GIZ sponsored), the Climate Change Adaptation AP, and the Sustainable Development Goals AP. It is felt that there is a need for coordination and collaboration among agencies so that indicators and data collection can be standardized whilst avoiding duplications and reducing the pressure on ministry and department personnel.

Although there are some positive reports on coordination in Ghana, there were challenges in sharing the AP early for coordination. However, this component has been positive in Cameroon, where officials at various levels meet annually to coordinate elements to be included in the journal for programming and budgeting. In Ghana, synergies between the AP and existing government initiatives were observed, and the benefits acknowledged. In addition, the AG-Scan and capacity building training, which was part of the AP, have led to the development of a process of data collection and transmission between national and sub-national levels, which has facilitated the evaluation of the implemented activities and programmes by MINADER. As a result, there have been improvements in the process of evaluating the performance of programmes and activities. Pillar leaders in Ghana formed a WhatsApp group and regularly coordinated their work. Due to positive coordination, some activities were partly funded by the GoG.

In Samoa, more coordination and sharing would have been useful, but as mentioned earlier, there haven't been any further actions following the finalization of the AP. Respondents alluded to the fact that at the time the post-AG-Scan AP was being developed, the Policy and Planning Division (PPD) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) appointed the Agriculture Sector Coordinating Division (ASCD) to be responsible for the implementation and follow up of the AP activities. The ASCD was created after the AG-Scan workshop and took over the M&E activities of the MAF. However, the handover processes between PPD and ASCD were not robust enough, and no information about the AVANTI initiative was transferred or shared. Hence the implementation of the post-AG-Scan AP has not moved forward since. For the AP to be implemented, therefore, it would have been helpful for the PPD and other stakeholders to be involved.

Other factors

Sharing and communication were identified as important factors in determining whether APs are implemented or not – lack of communication is a barrier and reduces the potential to access/secure funding. Stakeholders believed that key ‘influential persons’ who did not attend AG-Scans needed to be informed of the processes and outcomes. Ghana gave examples of such people as directors across decentralized levels. There was a feeling that the outcomes of the AG-Scan were not ‘sold to top management’, and these are the people who set priorities for resourcing.

Administrative processes and complexities were identified as a barrier. This was mainly highlighted in Cameroon, where accessing funding after approval by IFAD was considered a major barrier to implementing activities. IFAD is currently the main stakeholder funding the AP activities through PADFA II. The processes to unblock/approve funding for each activity are considered complicated and administratively heavy. This is exacerbated by constant changes in ministry personnel. To implement an activity, IFAD requests that the ministry prepare Terms of Reference (ToRs) that must be approved before funds are unblocked to start activities. Because this process must be followed for every activity, it causes delays. Stakeholders observed that IFAD could relax their procedures, or they could have shared/transferred the allocated funds for AP implementation to the Government Coordinating Agency for AVANTI initiatives so that there would be no need to request funds from PADFA II every time.

Implementation processes

Action planning and scheduling

The ability to set aside time for developing an AP was considered a positive enabler to following up on activities. In Cameroon, the AP process involved vital stakeholders responsible for key aspects of implementation, such as annual planning and data management. Having them plan together in their pillars was seen as a factor in enhancing the opportunities for implementation. In Ghana, there were issues with ambitious targets included in the AP that could not be funded, a lack of timelines and difficulties in ensuring the right people to implement the planned activities. In Samoa, the main challenges were in following up on the action plan. Although the AP was finalized, PPD did not share this and their experience of the AVANTI initiative with the ASCD, who was tasked with taking implementation forward. As noted in earlier sections, no AP was developed/finalized in Vietnam.

Stakeholder engagement and communication

Multi-stakeholder engagement was considered to be a success factor in Cameroon, especially during the completion of the AG-Scan and AP design stages. This was attributed to the sharing of views across different platforms. There have been efforts to share and engage stakeholders (apart from IFAD) to support the implementation of the AP through the Sectorial Platform and Rural Platform – in-country forums for consultation with national and development partners.

In Ghana, while there was good stakeholder involvement during AG-Scan AP development, there were also some misunderstandings on funding responsibilities and sharing amongst

stakeholders. While the issue of funding was explained at the workshop stage, MoFA's understanding was that implementing the Action Plan would receive IFAD funds. There was also no clear understanding that the AP could be shared outside MoFA agencies with other departments and partners who might be interested in funding implementation. For example, the AP could have been shared by MoFA at the Agriculture Sector Worker Working Group (ASWAG) meeting, a ministry platform that facilitates engagement with development partners, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations, among others. ASWAG meetings did not happen regularly in 2021. The AP could also have been shared on other platforms for MoFA directors. The importance of involving directors and personnel with decision-making capacity at an earlier stage, just after completion, was also highlighted.

Resources

Financial resources

Inadequate or outright lack of financial resources was the most highlighted barrier to implementing the APs. In Cameroon, the AP has received IFAD and government funding, but this has not been sufficient to achieve full implementation. Respondents observed that the MINADER has not been able to do some activities, such as providing incentives and motivation for M&E officers and necessary tools. A respondent observed that *“resources are limited, so activities need to be prioritized, which means that sometimes there are no resources available for M&E; the government has allocated some resources but not enough”*. An associated challenge, according to respondents, is the bureaucracy involved in unlocking approved funds from IFAD.

In Ghana, some AP activities have been implemented, but others have not been started due to a lack of funds. One of the key actions after the AP was completed was to find funds to resource its implementation. As the funds for the budget had to come from different sources, this implied sharing the AP within participant organizations – within MoFA, and with external stakeholders and donors. However, this process was not thoroughly followed through due to MoFA's misunderstanding that implementing the AP would receive IFAD funds. The missed opportunity to share the AP at the ASWAG with development partners, private sector, NGOs, and civil society organizations also resulted in a lack of funding opportunities. The AP could also have been shared on other platforms for MoFA directors to encourage shared funding. Notwithstanding these challenges, some activities have been included in district or national plans, which has helped implementation.

While the AP has not been finalized in Vietnam, respondents nonetheless identified challenges with implementing elements of the plan's activities. The main issue is that the resources for implementation and responsibilities of relevant parties have not been well defined; thus, it could be difficult to decide what to fund and by whom.

In Samoa, reflections on AP implementation included the lack of a financial plan linked to the allocating funds to implement activities. All key informants agreed on the negative effects of resource constraints.

Human resources and staffing (staff turnover)

Specific roles designated for AP finalization and implementation are a positive enabler to implementation. Respondents in Cameroon reported that success was enhanced by the availability of resource persons, consultants, and trainers and the skills of these people in RBM and management. However, constant government staff changes present challenges because it would be necessary to explain the processes every time new staff members come into post.

In Ghana, it was stated that the change of leadership in the Policy Planning Monitoring End Evaluation Division (PPMED), which is the secretariat of ASWAG, resulted in a slowdown of the frequency of scheduled meetings (which could have helped to promote the AP) as the new director was settling in. Staff turnover was also reported as a major challenge as people tend to be moved from one office to the next.

In Vietnam, the Government Coordinating Person (GCP) alluded to the challenges of getting in touch with AG-Scan workshop participants because half of these have changed positions or are no longer working at MARD. The coordinating officers in relevant agencies, departments, and local Directors of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDs) are not equipped with the knowledge to apply RBM in M&E. This has limited the extent to which the AP processes could be taken forward.

Other factors

Having **inadequate time** to devote to the AP and related processes was mentioned as a barrier. Lack of time was related to technical staff as they have competing priorities. This has been linked largely to multiple staff tasks. **Technical support and capacity building** are factors that can be enablers or barriers. Respondents highlighted the value of training and support afforded to various people. For instance, in Cameroon, the M&E team received training in managerial techniques which they now use in their work. With enhanced capacity and ability to utilize the skills effectively process can be improved. Similarly, in Ghana, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) staff have improved their capacity, which is very helpful, thanks to external support made available by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and the World Bank.

The respondents emphasized the facilitatory role of IFAD in Cameroon. In Ghana, respondents identified the technical support provided by GSAR Phase II of the FAO 50 by 2030 Initiative⁹ as a facilitator to change. However, Vietnam identified weak capacity in information analysis and evaluations as a key challenge, highlighting the need for technical support as an enabler for both capacity building and reducing pressure on state management agencies.

⁹ The 50x2030 Initiative was conceived to fill critical gaps in the availability and use of agricultural data in 50 low- and lower middle-income countries by 2030

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The following conclusions are derived from the findings and analysis under multiple questions and criteria. Each conclusion is followed by a brief discussion of the main findings to which it relates.

Conclusion 1: There has been good progress with the finalization of APs in the countries studied, but countries have not been at the same pace with implementation.

The AG-Scan workshops were conducted between 2018 and 2019 in all the studied countries. Following the conclusion of the AG-Scans, it was expected that APs would be produced and actioned. In Cameroon and Ghana, APs have been produced, and there has been some progress in their implementation. In Bolivia, Peru, and Samoa, APs have been produced, but no further work has been conducted, while in Vietnam, the AP has been initiated but not finalized.

Conclusion 2: Working with stakeholders to enable them to set aside the time to engage with AG-Scan processes was the biggest enabler for ensuring that APs were finalized.

In all the countries, the AG-Scan and follow-up AP processes involved key stakeholders responsible for important aspects of implementation, such as annual planning and data management. Having them come together to explore the different AG-Scan pillars and planning together was seen as a factor for the smooth finalization and enhancement of opportunities for implementation.

Conclusion 3: Important enablers of AP implementation were the alignment of AP and existing government priorities, as well as strong leadership and ownership by in-country governments.

The study showed that having APs aligned to government priorities was seen as a positive enabler of their implementation. Integrating plans into existing national- and district-level plans increases the probability that activities will get funding from other planned government activities. There was evidence in Cameroon and Ghana that AP activities such as training and related capacity building have become an integral part of district- and regional-level workplans and other activities. A recurrent activity in Ghana since the AP was produced has been the annual JSR meetings with stakeholders at the national and regional level.

Concerning leadership and ownership, respondents observed that if leadership is not actively or fully involved during assessment and planning processes, AP uptake would be compromised – hence, there is neither buy-in nor ownership. Evidence from Cameroon and Ghana suggests that having a designated government coordinator was key to ensuring the success of the finalization of the AP. In addition, it was also key to appointing a responsible person for each of the five pillars (core group). Having specific roles designated for AP finalization and implementation was also important. In Cameroon, for example, it was reported that success

was enhanced by the availability of resource persons, consultants, and trainers, and the skills of these people in the fields of RBM and management.

Conclusion 4: Inadequate or outright lack of financial resources was the most significant barrier to implementing the APs. Political and social instability also constituted barriers in some countries.

While there has been implementation of aspects of the APs in Cameroon and Ghana, respondents stated that available funds have not been sufficient to achieve the full implementation. In Ghana, it was observed that a key action after the AP was completed was to find funds from different sources, which implied sharing the AP widely within the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, and with other stakeholders and donors. However, this process was not thoroughly followed through due to a perceived misunderstanding that the implementation of the AP would receive IFAD funds. This then led to challenges in crowding-in resources and funds from different sources

In Vietnam, the main challenge is that the resources for implementation and responsibilities of relevant parties have not been well defined; thus, it could be difficult to decide what to fund and by whom. In Samoa, the lack of a financial plan linked to the AP to allocate funds to implementation created resource constraints.

In Bolivia and Peru, there has been an incidence of political and social instability during the period immediately following the finalization of the AG-Scan assessments and AP processes. The crises have been linked to changes in the management structures of governments and officials, which led to severe interruptions in taking forward the APs. The constant changes of officials and technical personnel who could take these processes forward constituted a major barrier to the implementation of the APs.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, three main areas for recommendations have been identified as follows:

Recommendation 1: For future similar initiatives, it is recommended that IFAD consider providing 'seed funding' to kickstart AP implementation processes.

The study has revealed the most significant barrier to the implementation of AG-Scan APs was funding. While it was possible for certain countries to kick start the implementation process, this was made possible by funds from IFAD in Cameroon and some capacity support from GAC in Ghana. Again, while it was expected that the ministries responsible for agriculture and rural development in the focus countries would commit funds to AP implementation, having some startup or seed funding would ensure that there is no lag time between AP finalization and when AP activities could be picked up within existing government processes and systems. For their part, lead country agencies should share learnings from AVANTI with other relevant government agencies and stakeholders involved in agriculture and rural development, such as

ministries of forestry, fisheries, livestock, and sustainable development. This will increase the prospects of shared funding.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that IFAD should use its convening power among donors to galvanize and crowd-in funding for the AP implementation.

The IFAD country office should be well placed to help explore the support of other development partners. In all the supported countries, there is some level of donor support and alignment on some of the activities. In galvanizing donor support, it will be important to ensure that the AG-Scan complements and does not duplicate other donor support.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the ministries responsible for agriculture and rural development in the supported countries should develop AP implementation plans.

Implementation plans should draw on costings in the APs, while ensuring that activities align with government processes, especially in terms of funding. The plans should include streamlining processes that consider AP activities and those already being implemented as part of existing government processes. Part of this process should include direct dialogue with top management at key related institutions so that they understand the work done and what is needed for effective AP implementation; this will increase commitment and buy-in at top levels. The agriculture ministries should also strengthen communication within their ministry and with other stakeholders. This should include sharing and communicating the developed AP with partners and stakeholders that will be involved or impacted by implementation to ensure its validity. All these activities will increase the probability that AP activities will be funded and implemented.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of people interviewed / participated in a Focus Group Discussion

Country	Name	Ministry / Organisation	Gender
Ghana	Patrick Kojo Ofori	Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Deputy Director Policy Planning of the Monitoring and Evaluation Directory & Head of M&E Division of the Directory Coordinator of the Ghana team	M
	Bernice Serwah Ofosu-Baadu	Ghana Statistical Service, Head of Agriculture and Environment Statistics	F
	Gorge Baawuah	Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Principal Agriculture Economist at the Policy Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation Directory	M
	Bright Atiase	National Development Planning Commission, Deputy Director for M&E	M
	Ruth Akos Oman	Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Policy Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation Directory	F
	Angela Dansson	Ministry of Food and Agriculture, External advisor Former Director of Policy Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation Directory	F
	Sidney Nii Oko	Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Deputy Director, Statistics, Research, and Information Directory	M
Cameroon	Michel Armand ZOA	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Head of the Follow-up Unit at MINADER	M
	Rodrigue ANKAN	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER),	M
	NGONGA Rosine	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Management controller of program 186	F
	NGOO MBA Eric Ulric (virtual)	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Management controller of program 185	M
	MBA Lyonnelle	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Follow up unit, Collaborator of Michel Armand ZOA	F
	Colette NGWE	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Staff of the Follow up Unit	F
	WAIBAM ZIE Awa	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Staff of the Follow up Unit	F
Vietnam	Mr Ba	Department of Planning (DOP) at the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD) and Government Coordinating Person for the AVANTI initiative	M
Samoa	Christopher Sinclair	Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, Principal Monitoring & Evaluation Officer at the Agriculture Sector Coordinating Division	M

Country	Name	Ministry / Organisation	Gender
BOL PER	Fata Philip Tuivavalagi	Food and Agriculture Organisation, Technical Advisor	M
	Keyonce Lee Hang	Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, Principal Policy Officer for the Policy, Planning & Communication Division	F
	Sharon Roma	Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, Principal Museums Officer	F

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Interviewer name: _____

Respondent Name and Institutional Affiliation: _____

Respondent Country: _____

Date: _____

NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: This is a semi-structured interview guide, designed to help ensure that you ask for the same types of information from all respondents toward producing a roughly comparable data set to be analyzed across countries. Do **not** feel compelled to read these questions verbatim or cover each and every question with each and every respondent. Please allow the respondent to direct the conversation and elaborate on his/her own work and perspectives as time allows. At the same time, please attempt to cover all topics in order to help build a comparable data set.

INTRODUCTION, INFORMED CONSENT AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I am working with the AVANTI team to conduct an assessment of the progress made with the post AG-Scan Action Plans. This study aims to identify lessons and what has worked well, or NOT, in the process of taking forward the Action Plans resulting from the AG-Scan that has been conducted in your country. Our conversation today is designed to help us learn more about any particular initiatives that may have helped in moving forward the Action Plans, and where progress has been slow, any specific reasons for this. ***This interview will last between 45 minutes to 1 hour.***

Confidentiality

I would like to record our conversation and take notes, so that the research team can utilize your perspectives to inform our analysis and can accurately represent the information you provide.

Your responses will be kept confidential. Your identity and/or organizational affiliation will **not** be revealed in reports, presentations, or articles and will not be recognizable to anyone beyond the research team. Your responses will be combined with those of other study respondents and will be presented as such, e.g., study respondents suggested...

Compensation and Freedom to Withdraw

There is no compensation for your participation in this study. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without any penalty.

Your Responsibilities

I want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. By voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study, we ask you to answer these questions with responses that are true for you or for your organization.

Do you have any questions at this time?

A. Introduction

1. Let's start with a few introductions. Could you please give me your official title, and a brief description of the regular work that you do?
2. Could you please give a description of all activities relating to the AVANTI initiative with which you and/or your office are involved?

Probes: Please describe any activities you are involved in, including:

- Working on the post AG-Scan Action Plan completion or implementation
- Implementing any of the initiatives contained in the Action Plan within your Ministry/Agency
- Collaborating with other Ministries or Agencies to implement initiatives geared towards SDG data collection and management
- Other

B. Barriers to the elaboration and ownership of the AG-Scan Action Plans

Now I will like to discuss the AG-Scan Action Plan with you in more detail

1. Can you please tell us the status of the AG-Scan Action Plan?

Probes: has the plan been finalized? **If yes, please go to section C**

If no, are there particular reasons why the plan has not been finalized? (For every reason provided, please probe further if necessary)

2. Is there anything that could have been done differently, to ensure the finalization of the action plan?
3. Any other ideas for what can be done, and by whom?

C. Enablers to the smooth completion and implementation of AG-Scan action plans

1. You mentioned that the plan has been finalized, is there a completed Action Plan document available which has been shared? Can you please tell us what led to the successful completion of the Action Plan, including the sharing?
2. On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being none, and 10 being all) what is the status of the implementation of the action plan? If implementation has started, which aspect of the plan has been implemented. Can you please tell us what led to the successful implementation of the aspects of the action plan?
3. Can you please tell us what key results have been achieved as part of the implementation of the action plan?

4. If none of the plan sections have been implemented, are there particular reasons why none of the plan sections have been implemented? If not all of the sections of the plan are being implemented, are there reasons?
5. Is there anything that could have been done differently, to ensure the smooth implementation of the action plan? Please give reasons for your answers with one or two examples.

D. Specific lessons learned from the implementation or lack of implementation, of the AG-Scan action plans

1. What would you say are the key lessons from the implementation of the action plans – in other words, if you were to do this again, what would you do differently? Please give reasons for your answer with one or two examples.
2. Do you have any recommendations for the smooth implementation and ownership of the action plans by stakeholders in your country?

Thank you for your time and the information you have provided today.

Your participation is very valuable to this study.