



Why leadership is the most important driver of a results and learning culture

Experiences from AVANTI AG-Scans

Introduction

Leadership is central to shaping organisational culture, while a culture of learning within organisations is a precondition for successful results-based management (RBM). RBM places the measurement of results at the heart of management¹ and emphasises the use of data, evidence and knowledge to inform decision making. This paper draws on early lessons from AVANTI Initiative AG-Scan processes to examine how leadership can shape the institutionalisation of a results and learning culture.

What is an AG-Scan?

The AG-Scan is a structured, facilitated process that enables government and other stakeholders to analyse the status of their capacities regarding RBM (results and M&E activities) in the agriculture and rural development sectors, including a plan to close gaps and improve performance.

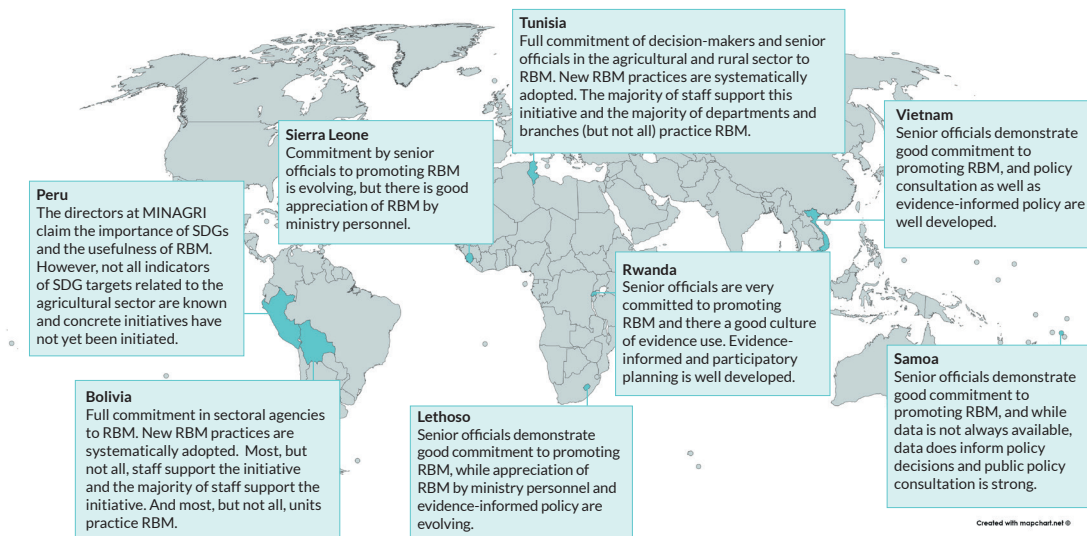
The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) funds the AVANTI Initiative (known simply as 'AVANTI'), which uses country-specific 'AG-Scans' to better understand the in-country strengths and opportunities for improved RBM in the agriculture and rural development sectors. The AG-Scan process places leadership at the heart of creating a results and learning culture within the institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development. The process adopts a participatory (workshop style) approach and explores five broad areas, shown in the table below.

Table 1: RBM capacity areas self-assessed as part of the AG-Scan process

Leadership 	Evaluation & monitoring 	Accountability & partners 	Planning & budgeting 	Statistics 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Commitment ▶ Results-informed policy ▶ Public consultation ▶ Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ M&E and data management capacity ▶ Evaluation systems, Results Management Framework ▶ Performance measurement ▶ Client satisfaction system ▶ Reporting alignment and harmonisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Accountability and transparency ▶ Policy and legal framework ▶ Capacity building of state and non-state actors ▶ Public access to results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coherent national agricultural sector plans ▶ Stakeholder participation in planning and budgeting ▶ Understanding change pathways ▶ Performance-based budgeting ▶ Donor alignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Statistics strategy ▶ Data disaggregation ▶ Data quality assessment ▶ Survey capability

¹ OECD, 2017

Figure 1: Summary of issues from the leadership assessments as part of the AG-Scans



From 2018 to 2019, AVANTI has undertaken AG-Scan self-assessments in ten countries; Ghana, Bolivia, Cameroon, Lesotho, Peru, Rwanda, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Vietnam. Figure 1 presents a narrative of the main issues in some of the countries where AG-Scan assessments have been undertaken, and shows that there is good commitment by senior officials in all the countries, to promoting RBM. In some of the countries however, public consultation is evolving while evidence-informed policy is patchy.

Creating a results and learning culture

An organisation has a learning and results culture when collective norms and beliefs support and encourage staff to actively seek out and learn from robust evidence (monitoring and reporting data, evaluations and research) generated internally and externally, on what works and what does not, and to take action based on this (Norad, 2018). A general impression from the AG-Scans is that while ministries undertake monitoring of activities, evaluation is generally lacking. Thus, the process of reflection and drawing lessons to feed into decisions on planning and budgeting is generally weak.

There is a focus on the core ethos of a results and learning culture throughout the AG-Scan self-assessment and action planning processes. The processes stress the need to build on monitoring, and on deliberately seeking evidence on the results of what has been achieved and using this information to challenge or support action. This should include creating the time to learn and reflect on what has worked and what has not. The workshops also raise awareness on the need to break silos and encourage exchange within the ministries and with others.

The role of leadership

As part of the AG-Scans, there is a critical assessment of the level of interest and commitment by political decision makers and senior management in promoting a culture of commitment to results and their use for decision-making processes.

From the four levers highlighted in figure two, leadership on managing for results means:

1. visibly and consistently communicating the importance of RBM
2. role modelling and leading by example in using results evidence in decision making
3. asking questions of others about the evidence base for decisions and the pathways to change that will be created by programmes



Figure 2: Organisational levers to create a learning culture

Public consultation in policy making is a potential means for achieving responsiveness through the inclusion of all interests, especially those from underprivileged and traditionally excluded groups.



Each of these leadership attributes will be explored in the context of the AVANTI AG-Scans, to understand how the initiative shapes and encourages them.

In the countries where AG-Scans have taken place, policy makers alluded to the challenges that they face such as political restraints and institutional practices, personal motivations and limitations on resources. There was, nonetheless, evidence of commitment and involvement from leaders to try and provide a push in managing for results, either at the level of ministries or at the level of agencies within core ministries.

Communicating the importance of RBM

Senior management should communicate the importance of knowing empirically (from rigorous data and objective analysis) what results are being achieved and using this evidence to inform decisions. This communication needs to be consistent and visible to staff. The AG-Scan not only places emphasis on the role that leaders should play in ensuring results-informed policy development, but also on public consultation as part of such policy development. Public consultation in policy making is a potential means for achieving responsiveness through the inclusion of all interests, especially those from underprivileged and traditionally excluded groups. Evidence from Peru showed that senior officials of the Agriculture Ministry were very engaged in the AG-Scan and led the process of action planning and demonstrated willingness to make the plan work, even after a complete change of Ministry staff.

Through communication of the benefits of RBM and the need to ensure its use, Honduras, though not an AVANTI country, has been invited by Peru and shown the experience of the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture on measurement of SDGs. Following the AG-Scan, the Planning Ministry in Peru invited AVANTI to explain the AG-Scan methodology as they recognise the need to promote RBM and are keen to replicate this with regional level institutions in the country. In Tunisia, leaders recognised the need to use the workshops to initiate cross-ministry collaboration, and to discuss the results as they affect the agriculture and rural development sectors, as well as within ministry departments.

Role modelling and leading by example in evidence-based decision making

Senior managers act as role models in managing for results. They should be seen to be requesting results evidence to inform the decisions they are making, and be actively engaging with and considering such evidence. The AG-Scan promotes the principles that leaders should be aware of, and ensures that there is a performance review of previous programmes. In Sierra Leone, the commitment of the director of Planning and M&E as part of the AG-Scan, ensured momentum for the workshop, including committing the Government Coordinating Group, to take the action planning forward. In Bolivia, leadership in the Planning Ministry was quite interested and demonstrated a willingness to lead the process of capacity building of other agencies, either within their own ministry or other ministries.

The Division for Policy, Planning and Communications, under the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries in Samoa, have anchored the AG-Scan process. The leadership within this Division was strong and ensured buy-in up to the very top of the Ministry. At the broader ministry level, decision-makers were pleased that the AG-Scan process helped to identify gaps in agriculture sector plans and management, and possible ways of moving forward. Mention was made of an upcoming midterm review for the sector, and how the AG-Scan fitted into that whole exercise.

Asking questions to others about the evidence base for decisions

Senior managers should also be seen to be asking staff what evidence has been considered and how initiatives have been shaped by it; in other words, how government is using evidence to support design and implementation of programmes. Having a robust performance measurement system in place, that is based on a sound results framework, is part of ensuring that evidence is collected. The AG-Scan process pushes for using this system by leaders to hold others accountable for being evidence-based agents; as part of institutional efforts to mainstream evidence into policymaking.

In some of the countries where AG-Scans have been held, there was evidence that leadership was aware of the drive for results and were using RBM; while the AG-Scan process provided the space and opportunity to reflect on how to strengthen these systems. In Bolivia, for example, the Agriculture Ministry leadership was very clear that they were already aware of the gaps that exist and what they wanted to do going forward. In Peru the Ministry of Agriculture is now working on the 'Estrategia por Resultados' (Strategy for Results), which is linked with the results-based budgeting effort anchored in the Ministry of Finance. In both Lesotho and Cameroon, leaders were very aware of gaps such as weak data collection systems, lack of coordination and limited mutual accountability between state and non-state players, and demonstrated commitment on taking recommendations forward.

The AG-Scan process advocates behaviour change that is focused on achieving results and robust evidence for decision making.



Conclusions

The AG-Scan process advocates behaviour change that is focused on achieving results and robust evidence for decision making. This requires leadership and management for it to be effective. Additionally, the whole process is country led and promotes local structures of accountability. Creating a result and learning culture stresses the need for the agencies in charge of the agricultural and rural development sectors to use the AG-Scan diagnostic and action plan as a basis for the improvement of their own capacity in RBM and measure progress in RBM practices against the action plan. The evidence from the AG-Scan assessments suggest that there is good commitment from senior officials to create and drive a culture of RBM; thus building on what already exists. The action plans that are developed after the assessment process, should allow governments to better target and address improvements as part of a process of continuous learning and adaptation.

Recommended literature

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