

AVANTI

Advancing Knowledge
for Agricultural Impact



Summary Report of the Sierra Leone AG-Scan:

Lessons learned and
key areas identified



April 2021

Background

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is funding the Advancing Knowledge for Agricultural Impact (AVANTI) initiative, which provides a self-assessment tool called AG-Scan. 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 their ability to measure the sectors' achievements against the SDGs. This in turn provides information to enable the generation of an Action Plan to improve governments' capacities to measure achievements against the SDGs.



AG-Scan Workshop (9-10 April 2019)

30 Participants
SF, 25M 

8 Government Institutions: Ministry of Food and Forestry, Statistics Sierra Leone, National M&E Department, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Decentralised Secretariat, Scaleup Nutrition

5 Supporting Institutions: IFAD, FAO, UNDP, WFP, Civil Society

Findings from the AG-Scan self-assessment

The Sierra Leone AG-Scan self-assessment was held in April 2019. The process adopted a workshop-style approach and explored five broad areas – Leadership, Evaluation and Monitoring, Accountability and Partners, Planning and Budgeting, and Statistics. Each broad area is scored on a scale of 1-4 which explored the 'functioning' and relative importance of the domain (1-issue is of no importance; 2-issue is moderately important; 3-issue is important; 4-issue is very important).

The sections below highlight participants' reflections on each of the domains. Although the scores were above average across the domains, there were slight differences in the relative importance of each of the them and hence the observed strengths and gaps.

Leadership (results-focus and institutional culture)

 This domain was scored 2.63 out of 4. The assessment showed that most of the technical leaders in Ministry Department or Agencies (MDAs) have substantial experience on RBM, which has led to a wide acceptance of RBM within sectors. In most of the MDAs therefore, sectoral plans are developed with the required indicators, outputs and outcomes. **Main gaps** are that political leaders within MDAs have limited experience in RBM, which affects their visibility

and commitment. There is also limited resources for implementation, which affects the ability to regularly collect and update relevant data. Thus, data are mostly outdated and do not reflect reality on the ground.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) (capacity and processes)

This domain was scored 2.13 out of 4. The assessment showed that there exists a national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) department and a strategy for RBM. Some of the MDAs have the required expertise for effective result planning and monitoring, and most MDAs carry out reviews while there are reporting systems in place in some. **Main gaps** identified include the lack of implementation of the national RBM strategy, hence many MDAs have different M&E frameworks not linked to it. Some MDAs also do not have M&E units. The capacity of MDAs in MEL is limited due to inadequate resourcing and weak support from senior management. MEL systems are not robust because of weak or inappropriate tools and inability to harness ICT. No regular review meetings are held in most MDAs to ascertain progress of project portfolios. This results in weak reports that are often out of date, with the exception of donor-funded activities.

Accountability (for performance and outcomes)

 This domain was scored 2.5 out of 4. An anticorruption commission has been established, and there was an Appropriation Bill in 2019 whereby all MDAs accounted for quarterly allocation by submitting



previous financial and M&E reports before accessing another allocation. A performance contract has been agreed with senior government officials (grade 11 and above), and an individual performance appraisal

system for grade 10 and below; these are seen as forms of accountability. **Main gaps** include the absence of an integrity committee in several MDAs, which should help in preventing misappropriation of public resources. The performance systems agreed for staff have also remained unimplemented. Where it has been implemented, most of the appraisees are not involved in these processes and so they do not know what they have been appraised for. There are gaps in access to transparent information. First, the information bill is not popularized and some government information is considered as 'classified'. Second, citizens at the local level have little or no access to information pertaining to development programs. Last, parliamentarians, government officials and civil society often do not give feedback to the public. Although civil society organizations have the capacity to effectively hold government to account for performance, they are limited to do this only through advocacy. In addition, civil society tends to be partisan; creating difficulties in holding government accountable.



Planning and budgeting (for performance and outcomes)

This domain was scored 2.7 out of 4. The assessments showed that there are existing national and sector development plans with

targets; with efforts in place to make planning participatory through the involvement of stakeholders in the process. The lead MDA has shown commitment to strengthening M&E by establishing a specialized agency. **Main gaps** include the implementation challenges for M&E; for example, only 5% was approved for M&E functions of the agricultural budget in 2019. Scenarios like this affect robust data collection and analysis. District councils are not always aware of plans and budget, while grassroots participation in budget preparations is all but absent. Donors operate on a different fiscal year, and this creates challenges for MDAs to engage and collaborate.

Statistics (data for RBM)

Statistics was scored 2.25 out of 4. The assessment showed that there are national-level strategies for data, which are relatively well resourced and there is up-to-date data in some areas. This is, however, less at the sector level, although some of the MDAs have capacity for data analysis; and there is a need to improve data storage. **Main gaps** include weak management and dissemination of the gathered data and weak resourcing of M&E in MDAs in terms of budget and staff. This has a negative impact on timeliness, reliability and quality of data collection, and often makes data of questionable quality. This is exacerbated by limited data quality assurance procedures. While relevant data seem to be available in disaggregated form, there are still no data to undertake risk and value for money assessments. In many instances, risk assessments are not undertaken during implementation of programs.

Lessons learned

Four critical and interrelated clusters of lessons came out of the AG-Scan process, which are highlighted below.

A. Leadership and RBM/MEL capacity

The country is decentralized politically and political commitment comes from the local councils. However, the reporting lines between government and local councils is not clear. At the MDA level, the demand for data by political leaders is relatively high, but the effective use remains a challenge, due to limited capacity in RBM. Data are not widely shared to ensure that lessons learned are taken into consideration, while feedback from management is very weak. Although there is a strategy for RBM, inadequate capacity for implementation within MDAs remains a challenge.

Lesson 1 is the need to clarify reporting lines and structures to ensure better information flow.

Lesson 2 is the need for improving skills of leaders in RBM, and for information flows within the MDAs to be intensified. This could be through in-house learning within ministries to contextualize the issues, so that application becomes easier.

Lesson 3 is the need to develop MEL capacity and processes in MDAs – human resources, finance, tools and equipment. There is also a need to

improve the importance attached to M&E functions in most of the MDAs. This could be through helping them to evolve M&E units that are resourced with adequate staffing and finances.

B. Process of program review, adaptations and feedback

Most MDAs carry out reviews, but a main challenge is the perverse incentives concerning field allowances. This process often excludes technical people with the right skills, and thus, limits the process of learning and adaptation is absent. Feedback processes involve some discussion on performance and project outcomes and impact, with the public through radio and other media; however, coverage is quite low, and citizens at the grassroots level have little or no access to information pertaining to development programs.

Lesson 1 is the need to ensure that staff of the right caliber are responsible for undertaking reviews. There is also the need to improve the process of learning and adaptation by ensuring that the recommendations from reviews are implemented.

Lesson 2 is the need to increase the coverage of the feedback provided to citizens on project outcomes. Related to this is the need to enlighten citizens about the access to information bill. This should improve the ability of citizens to demand for more information.

C. Improving accountability

The introduction of staff performance systems in MDAs is seen as an accountability mechanism, but they have been non-functional. Many of the donors have a different fiscal year, which limits collaboration.

Lesson 1 is the need to ensure that integrity committees are put in place in MDAs and made functional, to prevent misappropriation of public resources.

Lesson 2 is the need to ensure that the appraisal systems are made effective, including ensuring that there is a mechanism in place for involving those being appraised

Lesson 3 is the need to get donor processes aligned with government processes, to improve

collaboration among donors and MDAs. This will also eliminate duplication of projects and ensure better distribution of resources for targeted groups.

D. Improving data quality

There is weak institutional alignment across MDAs, which limits collaboration and increases overlaps in functions. Many MDAs also do not have M&E structures in place and are unable to undertake thematic studies. There are structures in some MDAs for quality assurance through data validation processes but this is not available at all levels.

Lesson 1 is the need to clarify MDA mandates to eliminate overlaps and improve collaboration

Lesson 2 is the need to improve data quality assurance procedures across MDAs. This will help improve the reliability and credibility of the information

Lesson 3 is the need to train personnel in data collection, including digital data collection. This could ensure regular and up-to-date training on emerging software to enhance capacities

Conclusions and way forward

Given that the AG-Scan coincided with the finalization of the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP), the new national results framework and the mobilization of the National M&E Department, it was particularly important to ensure that the AG-Scan action planning complemented or was integrated with these government initiatives. It was also important to ensure that the AG-Scan complemented and did not duplicate other donor/external agency support. These principles were included in the agreed objectives for the action planning meeting.

The workshop process was able to leverage the Government Coordinating Group to take on the task of further developing the Action Plan and look for ways of mobilizing it. It is important to take the action planning forward, and in a way that is in step with the government's agenda for RBM development and not create a parallel process that would risk being irrelevant. There is no doubt that the government will need long-term support developing and implementing RBM. While the

long-term support is beyond the scope of AVANTI, there may be ways in which IFAD could harness the momentum created by the AG-Scan and

explore with other development partners how to provide support.

SDGs in Sierra Leone¹

There has been increased appreciation of the SDGs in Sierra Leone. The recently launched Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) (2019–2023) titled ‘Education for Development’ is aligned to the Africa Union Agenda 2063 and the SDGs; and will strategically guide the delivery of services and ensure that no one is left behind in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone has identified SDG4 (education) and SDG16 (justice) as accelerators for pursuing its developmental agenda, based on estimations that both goals are central in its transformational trajectory.

Currently, basic, inclusive and quality education stands out as the premier development necessity for Sierra Leone. Since August 2018, the government has allocated 21% of the National Budget to the Free Quality School Education program, to ensure that all children have access to basic and senior school education. Currently all pupils, even those in remote communities, have access to textbooks for core subjects, other learning materials and improved services, free of cost. The initiative has benefited 2.14 million boys and girls in government-owned and government-assisted schools, saving poor parents an appreciable amount of money to start small-scale business.

¹ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23012Sierra_Leone_Key_SDGs_Messages.pdf