



# Graduating to Resilience

## Gender



### CONTEXT

Research shows that societies with higher gender equity enjoy improved food security, have greater agricultural productivity, and experience faster economic growth. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, total agricultural output in developing countries could increase by 2.5 to 4%, reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 12% to 17%, or for up to 150 million people.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there is a growing understanding of the importance of women in agriculture, food security, and nutrition, which requires a more purposeful approach to gender integration in these fields. As such, it should endeavor to not only strive to include and benefit women as participants, but also empower women as equal decision-making parties in choices that affect themselves, their families, and ultimately have the potential to lead to more sustainable change. Gender mainstreaming is one tool and approach to ensure that women are considered in all activities and engaged accordingly to promote greater equity and decision-making power.

**Ugandan Context**

78%			75%
Adult food insecurity prevalence <sup>3</sup>			
15%			9%
Time spent on unpaid domestic chores and care work <sup>3</sup>			
	26%	Intimate partner physical or sexual violence rate against women aged 15-49 <sup>3</sup>	
	66	Ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index <sup>4</sup>	

**The Graduating to Resilience Activity** is a USAID/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA) led by AVSI Foundation in partnership with Trickle Up and AIR, which seeks to test the Graduation Approach's ability to graduate ultra-poor refugee and host community households in Kamwenge District from food insecurity and fragile livelihoods to self-reliance and resilience. This seven-year Activity will engage 13,200 households that are economically active, but chronically unable to meet their basic needs without some form of assistance, in two cohort periods.



### WHAT WE DID

Recognizing the inter and intra dependency of members of a household and the shared set of responsibilities and assets in a household, the Graduating to Resilience Activity (the Activity) employs a woman-plus household approach to identifying and engaging participants. The Activity selects a woman and/or youth in the household to engage in programming as a primary participant. This approach of targeting women and youth members of the household is intentional, as they are often the ones who are traditionally excluded or marginalized from decision-making around livelihood choices and earned income. The approach also builds space to engage the whole household, inclusive of men.

*Data used in this brief are performance monitoring data or data collected for the formative assessments conducted by the Activity. The data are not intended to measure impact.*

<sup>1</sup> Hafez Ghanem, The State of Food and Agriculture 2010/11: Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development. (Rome: The Food and Agricultural Organization, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00TXW7.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TXW7.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.unwomen.org/country/uganda>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)

In 2019, during the initial refinement period for Cohort One, the Activity conducted a Gender Analysis<sup>2</sup> to identify specific gender issues, inequalities, constraints, and opportunities in the area of operation to support designing effective programs to promote improved gender norms. This analysis found that male household members, both in host and refugee communities, dominated decision-making processes on topics including food security, livelihoods and income, and children’s health and nutrition. Further, there was an unequal balance in household workload, with women taking on most of the unpaid care work, including fetching water, collecting firewood, cleaning the house, and caring for children and the elderly or sick. Whereas women were heavily involved in agricultural production, it was often limited to labor related to households’ production, while men tended to maintain control over selling and marketing the harvest. This often resulted in men controlling household finances and decision-making. This behavior was reflective of social and community norms recognizing the man as the head of household. This was further supported by beliefs, expressed by both men and women, that a husband needs to discipline his wife if she is deemed to be out of line. This discipline often resulted in violence, which tended to be underreported by survivors.

Findings from the Gender Analysis (2019) informed the Activity’s approach to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment within interventions in Cohort One. Specifically, in Cohort One the Activity included the following overarching considerations in its gender mainstreaming approach:

- **Engaged and integrated male spouses and other household members** in Activity interventions, including coaching, farmer field business school (FFBS), and cooking demonstrations, to promote behavior change on gender norms to support increased household well-being and resilience.
- **Considered women’s responsibilities and time commitments** including for Activity interventions and scheduled activity frequency and session (e.g. timing/length of activities), so as to not place an undue burden on women or inhibit their ability to participate, or to fulfill other responsibilities.
- **Incorporated messages into household coaching that focused on reducing gender disparities** in access to and control over resources, income, opportunity, and services, with an emphasis on joint decision-making to address barriers to women’s empowerment.
- **Promoted women’s participation in leadership positions** in village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) and other community activities.
- **Responded to and mitigated gender based violence (GBV) concerns** while promoting positive gender norms in coaching and training materials.
- **Identified and disseminated information on existing formal and informal feedback and referral mechanisms** (e.g. gender, nutrition, legal, etc.) to participants to promote awareness and uptake of needed services outside Activity implementation.

Drawing on the intentional integration and mainstreaming of gender throughout interventions, the Activity achieved the following gender-related outcomes in Cohort One:

<b>88%</b> Females reported as having high self-efficacy	<b>66%</b> Women of reproductive age consuming a diet of minimum diversity	<b>94%</b> Women in union and earning cash who report participation in decisions about the use of spouse/partner’s self-earned cash
<b>2%</b> Participants who report experiencing GBV	<b>94%</b> Women in union and earning cash who report participation in decisions about the use of self-earned cash	

### WHAT WE LEARNED

Throughout Cohort One implementation, the Activity drew on monitoring data; feedback from community members, project staff and other key stakeholders; and formative research to continually assess the Activity’s assumptions around gender and adapt implementation approaches and strategies in real-time based on participant needs and the realities on the ground.

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“For me, I thought that leadership was for those who are gifted by God until when I saw people entrusting me with the authority to be their leader in my community. I saw everyone raise their hand up to mention my name to be their leader and that’s when I started believing in myself.”

*- Adult female FGD from the refugee community*

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**The Activity was successful in changing gender dynamics across several dimensions.**

At the conclusion of Cohort One, self-efficacy among female participants was reported as high (88%). Female participants indicated that they felt more confident negotiating with their spouse, managing conflict, and participating in joint decision-making, particularly around household financial decisions. Female participants also noted increased participation in business and community activities, including taking on leadership roles within community structures such as VSLAs, local

councils, and refugee welfare committees (RWCs). Both men and women indicated that this increase in confidence contributes to better outcomes within the household, including increases in household savings, improved ability to pay for unexpected costs such as medical bills, better nutrition practices and meals, and the ability to pay for education-related expenses, including school fees, books, and clothes.

**Attitudes and perceptions around gender equality improved dramatically during Cohort One, with more women and men agreeing with gender equality statements.**

This change in attitude appears to have facilitated improvements in behavior, particularly around women’s engagement in market activities, community gatherings, and joint decision-making. Notably, men and women appear to be jointly making decisions on food crop farming, livestock rearing, and household expenditures. To some extent, there also appears to be joint decision-making around nutrition, children, family planning, and healthcare; however, those are still perceived as largely female domains.



Photo: AVSI Foundation

Although participants indicated that GBV is still an issue within their communities, fewer individuals reported directly experiencing GBV in the past 30 days. Although this may partially be due to underreporting, feedback from participants suggests that there has been a reduction in GBV since the Activity began. This reduction in GBV could be due to the role and engagement of the coaches employed by the Activity.

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“I never talked about the issues I had with my spouse, but after coaching sessions, I with my spouse would resolve them quietly without any intervention of the coach or CBT. Topics like setting smart goals, household planning, savings, sharing household responsibilities, preventive health and WASH created a big impact in my household.”

- Adult female FGD from the refugee community

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**Coaching was overwhelmingly identified as the most influential activity in changing gender norms.** Through coaching, households learned how to better communicate, resolve disputes, and jointly plan. Coaching was also noted as an essential tool for reducing GBV, as coaches often served as mediators when issues arose. Individual coaching was more commonly preferred than the group coaching model, as individual coaching provided households with a safe space to discuss and work through specific challenges they were encountering and allowed other household members, including children, to participate in sessions, which increased buy-in and uptake of learnings.

**Asset transfer and consumption support were cited as useful tools for helping improve households’ well-being and promoting women’s empowerment and ownership of assets.** In particular, the support helped households expand or start new businesses, meet basic needs, improve living conditions, and increase their savings, making them less vulnerable to shocks.



## HOW WE ADAPTED FOR COHORT TWO

Based on learnings from Cohort One, the Activity made the following adaptations to the Cohort Two design and gender mainstreaming approach to further promote and enhance gender equity outcomes.

### **Refined and reordered the coaching curriculum to better sequence and address inequitable gender norms.**

Although attitudes and perceptions around gender equality improved among both men and women during Cohort One implementation, feedback from staff and participants alike suggested that addressing inequitable norms earlier in the coaching curriculum could lead to even greater changes in the future. It was also noted that there was confusion around

the woman plus household approach among men, which led them to resist participating and supporting their wife or female household member. Despite improved gender outcomes, the Activity found that there was still an unequal division of labor, with women spending more hours a day working than men. This was largely driven by the fact that women usually are still primarily responsible for completing household activities such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, and caring for children



Photo: AVSI Foundation

and elderly/sick household members; in addition to now having a greater role in economic activities. As such, the Activity refined the Cohort Two coaching curriculum moving up topics such as conflict negotiation and management, joint decision making, and shared responsibilities, as these can address inequitable gender norms from the outset and allow time for change with the support of a coach and mentor. Positive gender norms can then set the foundation for other important topics covered in the curriculum, such as nutrition, savings, etc. With the refinement of the curriculum, the Activity maintained the support mechanisms in place and continues to train and build the capacity of coaches to mainstream gender within their activities. In addition to refining the curriculum, based on participant feedback on the benefits of the home visits and one-on-one coaching in Cohort One, the Activity also incorporated individual household touch points within the group coaching model being implemented in Cohort Two. Through one-on-one sessions with households, coaches will be able to better engage with other household members, including male household members, and help reinforce gender topics and learnings.

**Increased women’s access to and ownership of mobile phones and digital literacy.** According to the Gender Assessment conducted in 2021, mobile phone use increased substantially for both women and men. Although mobile phone use among both male and female participants increased substantially over the course of Cohort One, ownership and decision-making around mobile phone use are still largely driven by male household members. Specifically, although mobile phones are typically shared among household members, women were less likely than men to indicate being responsible for deciding whether they should own a mobile phone, with 91% of males reported being the one to make this decision, relative to 78% of females.<sup>5</sup> In addition to a more limited role in the decision-making process, female participants were also more likely to report facing barriers to using mobile phones such as limited understanding of or skills for using such devices, not understanding the language used by information communication technology (ICT) companies, and a general lack of access to ICT services.<sup>6</sup> As such, access to mobile phones and digital literacy on how their use has the potential to improve women’s ability to manage household funds and community savings. A mobile phone can also enhance women’s farming and business activities by facilitating access to information about extension services, crop prices, farm inputs, weather, and more. To improve and bridge the gender digital gap between men and women and facilitate access to information, resources, opportunities, and markets, the Activity provided mobile phones to all Cohort Two primary participants. Being mindful of the limitations of technology as well as potential issues over ownership, prior to distributing the mobile phones the Activity sensitized both primary participants and male spouses on the purpose and use of the mobile phones. During Cohort Two, the mobile phones will be used to distribute the consumption support and asset transfer via mobile money, notify participants of upcoming Activity interventions, and disseminate social behavior change communication (SBCC) messages on topics including fraud, nutrition, and gender. In addition, with the mobile phones, participants will be able to independently access information provided

**Evidence Around Community Engagement and Behavior Change**

Community engagement activities have been effective in promoting behavior change, including around gender norms. The USAID-funded Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation (GREAT) Project implemented in Northern Uganda found that adolescents and adults who either listen to radio dramas developed by the project or participated in Community Action Groups and youth groups reported positive changes in gender equity, partner communication, family planning and use and attitudes towards GBV.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> AVSI. Graduating to Resilience Gender Assessment (2021). Pg. 36  
<sup>6</sup> [http://irh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/GREAT\\_Results\\_Brief\\_global\\_07.10\\_8.5x11.pdf](http://irh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/GREAT_Results_Brief_global_07.10_8.5x11.pdf)

by sources outside of the Activity around crop prices, agricultural techniques, weather, etc. To promote improved digital literacy, participants will receive mini-lessons on features of their phones during group coaching sessions.

**Incorporated community engagement activities to promote community-level behavior change around improved gender norms, including GBV.** Gender norms and attitudes are deeply entrenched in households and communities and perpetuated by tradition and culture. The Gender Assessment identified that one of the barriers to changing gender norms on a larger scale beyond individual households was negative peer influence, particularly among men. Many male participants or spouses of primary participants in Cohort One noted that they had changed their perceptions of gender roles and GBV. However, pressure from other community members, notably non-participant households, affected uptake and behavior change on a larger scale. Additionally, while religious leaders play a key role in both host and refugee communities and could serve as positive change agents for promoting more equitable gender norms and changing attitudes toward GBV, the Activity found that religious leaders often promote negative gender norms and stereotypes—for example, the idea that only men can be leaders and that women should be subservient to men. Local and religious leaders are also often hesitant to follow up on GBV incidents for fear of retribution or because they do not want to disrupt the status quo. To address these issues and promote community-level attitude change around gender norms and GBV, the Activity will include more community engagement activities in Cohort Two. These activities will focus on disseminating information around key gender issues facing communities as well as raising awareness of GBV referral mechanisms, reporting frameworks and laws, and survivor-centered and women's rights. This will be done through community dialogues and outreach activities that draw on dance, drama, and role-play to convey key messages. The Activity will also collaborate with community structures such as community clinics and radio stations to promote awareness around gender issues and the services available.

**Intentional targeting of males for participation in interventions through greater sensitization and awareness of the Activity's purpose and objectives.** One of the key issues noted in Cohort One was the need for greater male engagement. Low male engagement was largely a result of



Photo: AVSI Foundation

misconceptions around the purpose of the Activity and misunderstanding of the woman-plus household approach. To mitigate this challenge in Cohort Two, the Activity included men and other household members in the sensitization and introduction sessions at the beginning of implementation. The sensitization provided an explanation of the goal and purpose of the Activity, clearly defining the woman-plus household approach, outlining how activities are meant to benefit the entire household, and providing explicit guidance for how men can engage in the Activity, including participation

in coaching, FFBS, etc. This sensitization also included a comprehensive orientation and introduction to the consumption support and asset transfer cash injections to ensure that all household members have a common understanding that the support is intended to benefit the entire household, even though it is delivered to the female. To demonstrate the Activity's commitment to the household approach and to help solicit greater buy-in and support from household members, the Activity adapted the participant consent form to include signatures for both the primary female participant and another member of the household social contract arrangement. Other Activity interventions where spousal involvement will be deliberate include business coaching to enhance joint decision-making and FFBS. Additionally, the Activity has targeted male youth as primary participants and introduced the component of apprenticeship for the youth.

**Leverage local service providers to address GBV issues in a more sustainable way.** Although reporting of GBV incidents among Activity participants appears to have declined throughout Cohort One, GBV was still noted as a general challenge in both host and refugee communities. Furthermore, GBV reporting and referral systems were noted as being ineffective, which leads many survivors to not report incidents because of lack of action taken by the authorities, lack of follow-up or access to services, and fear of retribution from the perpetrator. In these instances, many Activity participants noted that they seek support from the coaches if they are experiencing GBV rather than report it through official channels, which may also be contributing to the low reporting rates. While the coaches' willingness, availability, and effectiveness in supporting participants with issues of GBV was noted as a key learning from Cohort One, this is not sustainable. Existing local mechanisms and reporting systems need to be strengthened to ensure that GBV issues can sufficiently be addressed after Activity implementation is complete. While addressing the systemic issues and challenges facing the GBV referral and reporting mechanisms is outside of the scope of the Activity, during Cohort Two the Activity will work to strengthen its internal referral mechanisms to promote greater use of existing community resources. Specifically, in Cohort Two the Activity will update the service providers' inventory to better understand who within the ecosystem is providing which service so that the Activity can refer participants to local resources that meet their needs. The Activity will facilitate bi-annual service providers' meetings to take the service points through the Activity's referral process and create working relationships to bridge existing identified gaps. The Activity will continue to uphold the strong Reporting and Accountability Mechanisms to track gender issues among participants including a no-tolerance approach to exploitation, harassment, and fraud while also building the capacity of participants to identify forms of abuse.



## HOW WE WILL CONTINUE LEARNING:

While the Activity made great strides in learning and adapting interventions to better address the specific gender constraints and issues facing participants, there is still much to be learned about how the Graduation Approach, and specifically the woman-plus household approach, can contribute to and promote longer-term sustainability of household resilience and wellbeing outcomes. Furthermore, it is important to understand how this approach can promote and shift or potentially negatively impact community level-attitude change around gender norms and expectations if careful considerations are left out. Findings from Cohort Two learning will be shared with donors, policymakers, local stakeholders, and other organizations implementing the Graduation Approach to contribute to the evidence base around the model and promote the most effective and efficient approach to supporting extremely poor households to become more self-reliant and resilient.



## SUCCESS STORY

At 55, Adrine regained her poise. She can now speak with confidence to an audience, make decisions at home, and work closely with her husband Geoffrey on any of their chores. A focal person in her village, Adrine is respected at home and in her community. Years ago, the couple left their home in Isingiro District in Western Uganda with several plans to build their future. They settled in Kamwenge District looking for farming land and better opportunities, and here they bore ten children.

*“Geoffrey believed that a woman’s role in a family was to do chores while the man was to take care of the money”*

Their routine reflected what Geoffrey believed in. While Adrine was busy cultivating maize and beans for food, and using the extra money to buy clothes and to pay school fees for their children, Geoffrey preferred to hang around a nearby town with his friends. Soon, the once loving husband became violent toward his wife.

*“I asked Geoffrey to support his wife and to work together for the betterment of their household.”*

*- Coach Henry*



Photo: AVSI Foundation

When Adrine’s household was chosen to be part of the Activity, they were assigned to coach Henry Turyasingura who walked them through a path to achieve their development goals. But when the coach realized that husband and wife were not cooperating, he began working with them on reinforcing positive gender messages. He encouraged them to work together, share roles and make joint decisions and planning. Geoffrey followed the advice and gradually began to support his wife. In the past, the couple had poor crop harvests or nothing to rely on for an income, now they enjoy the benefits of animal husbandry. They rear four goats, two pigs, and three cows from which they get five liters of milk each day for their breakfast.

Using their experience, Adrine and Geoffrey now counsel couples who face gender-based violence in their homes as they continue to increase their collaboration and build a brighter future for themselves and their children.

*“One day, he brought me a nice pair of shoes and took me to the market to choose a dress and he paid for it.”*



Photo: AVSI Foundation