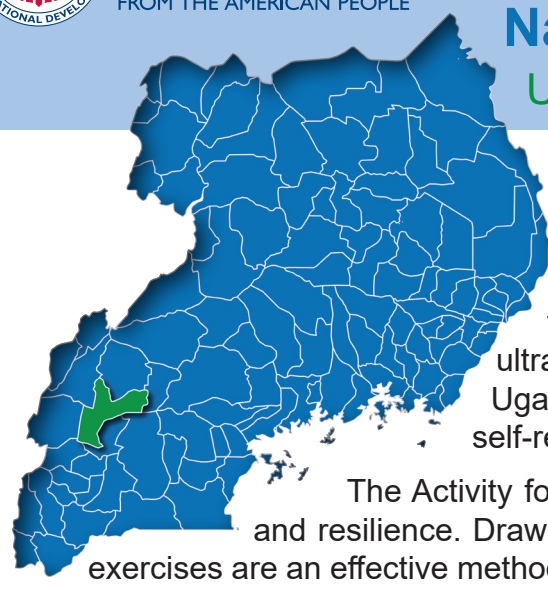


Navigating Towards Success: Utilizing Graduation Maps in Goal Setting



Graduating to Resilience (the Activity) is a USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) funded activity led by AVSI Foundation (AVSI) in partnership with American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Trickle Up. The Activity (2017-2024) seeks to test the Graduation Approach's effectiveness to graduate ultra-poor refugee and host community households in Western Uganda from conditions of food insecurity and fragile livelihoods to self-reliance and resilience.

The Activity focused on coaching as a key approach to achieve self-reliance and resilience. Drawing on international best practices which suggest that visioning exercises are an effective methodology to support household mentoring and coaching programs, the Activity used graduation maps as a coaching tool to facilitate self-reflection and goal setting with participants (see Exhibit 1). Graduation maps are visual tools to help participants identify their goals, monitor their progress, and create clear pathways to success. By actively engaging in the planning process and setting their own goals, graduation maps help participants develop a sense of ownership over their progress and goal setting.

Exhibit 1 . Activity Graduation Map

The Activity developed and contextualized the graduation maps to ensure that they would be easy for participants to use and understand to track their progress and goal setting. Activity coaches assisted participants in developing their graduation maps and reviewed the graduation maps with participants on a bi-weekly basis. Participants set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound (SMART) goals, across five main areas: food security and nutrition, savings, business, basic needs, and self-efficacy. Participants reviewed the graduation maps weekly and updated the maps with their families on a quarterly basis to track progress against their goals and make necessary adjustments to plan for and achieve their short and long-term goals.

The Activity developed a learning question as part of the Activity's robust learning agenda to better understand the utility of the graduation maps and how they contributed to participants' achievement of short and long-term goals. The learning question asks: **How do graduation maps contribute to participants' achievement of short-term and graduation goals?**

This learning question seeks to test the hypothesis that the graduation maps contribute to participants' sense of self-efficacy based on the assumption that by clarifying one's goals and identifying the challenges to obtaining them, and discussing these openly with one's family and coach, the participant feels more empowered to reach their goals and are less stressed or overwhelmed by the potential obstacles in their way, contributing to a greater sense of agency or self-determination.



Participants showing their completed graduation map. Household members work together to discuss, prioritize, and plan using the graduation map. Photo: AVSI.

To answer this learning question, the Activity collected qualitative data through focus group discussions (FGDs) to understand participant experiences using the graduation maps in their households, whether they felt the graduation map was a useful tool to help them achieve their goals, and their recommendations to improve the utility of the tool. The Activity also reviewed data from the Cohort 1 resilience study which looked at whether households were using the graduation maps after completing the program. From the FDGs, three key themes emerged that contribute to answering this learning question.



THEME 1: SIMPLIFICATION OF GOAL SETTING

While graduation itself is a high-level goal, the graduation maps helped participants break down this overarching goal into smaller, more attainable steps to help them achieve their short- and long-term goals over time. The design and utility of the tool enabled many of the participants to achieve their short and long-term goals in collaboration with their families. One FGD participant emphasized, "This graduation map has been instrumental in guiding me on to plan for my household. Utilizing it, I structured plans for my business, outlined strategies for our family's nutrition, savings, and meeting basic needs. The emphasis on setting smart goals has enabled me to establish and adhere to a well-defined plan." Furthermore, the majority of participants shared that they are motivated to use the graduation maps because it helps them meet their goals. Another participant shared, "The graduation map motivates me to work harder and achieve the goals set whereas the self-reflection tool encourages me to work towards filling all the cups." Through the graduation maps, participants gained a new sense of motivation, self-efficacy, and a greater sense of agency to track their progress against their goals. Therefore, the simplification of the graduation maps in goal setting helped participants work towards their goals.



THEME 2: COLLECTIVE PLANNING AND ACTION WITHIN FAMILIES

Nearly all FGD participants reported completing the graduation maps in the coaching sessions and tracking their progress in their households. Much of the self-reflection and monitoring outside of the coaching sessions was completed with family members. Participants highlighted that reviewing the map with their families has contributed to collective planning, as well as a shared endeavor towards shaping their short and long-term goals. The majority of participants mentioned that their low literacy levels also encouraged family engagement in tracking progress. One participant mentioned, "The significance of the graduation map lies in its constant use. Despite my inability to read and write, my children consistently remind me of the goals we collectively set as a family. This regular review and adherence to our plan contribute to the overall success of our objectives." Furthermore, participants underscored the importance of engaging family members in outlining their goals, tracking progress, and making collective decisions to achieve their goals. By encouraging participants to use the graduation maps at home, it opened up opportunity for discussion, planning, reflection, and goal-setting within their households; this meaningful interaction contributed to participants' achievement of short and long-term goals.



THEME 3: CONTINUED MAP UTILIZATION POST IMPLEMENTATION

Findings from a report on sustained graduation 18 months after the conclusion of Cohort 1 implementation show that 37% of participants continue to use the graduation maps for goal setting in their households. Additionally, 94% of participants reported that they are still using planning goal-setting techniques that they learned through the coaching sessions. Self-efficacy continues to remain strong among participants with 90% agreeing that they can set goals to improve the well-being of their households, and participants indicated that they continue to set individual and household goals and track their progress to meet their goals. For example, one respondent highlighted: "...I felt trainings I had received had empowered me to set goals on my own and achieve them. And truly, I achieved my goal, I have my fully complete house in the village, where I live together with my children, so far, I have just plastered it, but I am preparing



Coaches facilitate sessions on how to use the graduation map, walking participants through the process of setting SMART goals across the five main areas: food security and nutrition, savings, business, basic needs, and self-efficacy. Photo: AVSI.

to cement it and even paint it so that I live decently..." Furthermore, participants expressed that the Activity had contributed to positive changes in their lives.

The findings from the FGD data and resilience study highlight the simplicity and utility of the graduation maps. Many participants highlighted that their low literacy levels were the only potential challenge to fully utilizing their maps; however, they worked around this by reviewing and updating the graduation maps with their families. Participants used the maps as a tool to create actionable steps towards

achieving their goals, and they also used the maps with their households to collectively plan and review the maps with their families. Furthermore, the graduation maps have helped motivate participants to track progress towards their goals, to engage family members in collective decision-making.

When asked if participants have any recommendations to improve the graduation maps for future use, many emphasized that they would like the maps to remain in their current format. One participant mentioned that they would like to have a bigger map after the Activity ends so that they have more space to record and track their goals. In summary, most participants agree that the maps were useful in achieving their short- and long-term goals, especially with the help of their households.

Read more on the [Activity graduation maps here](#).