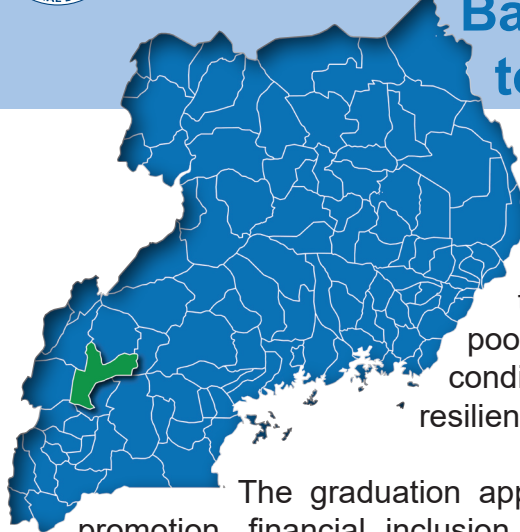


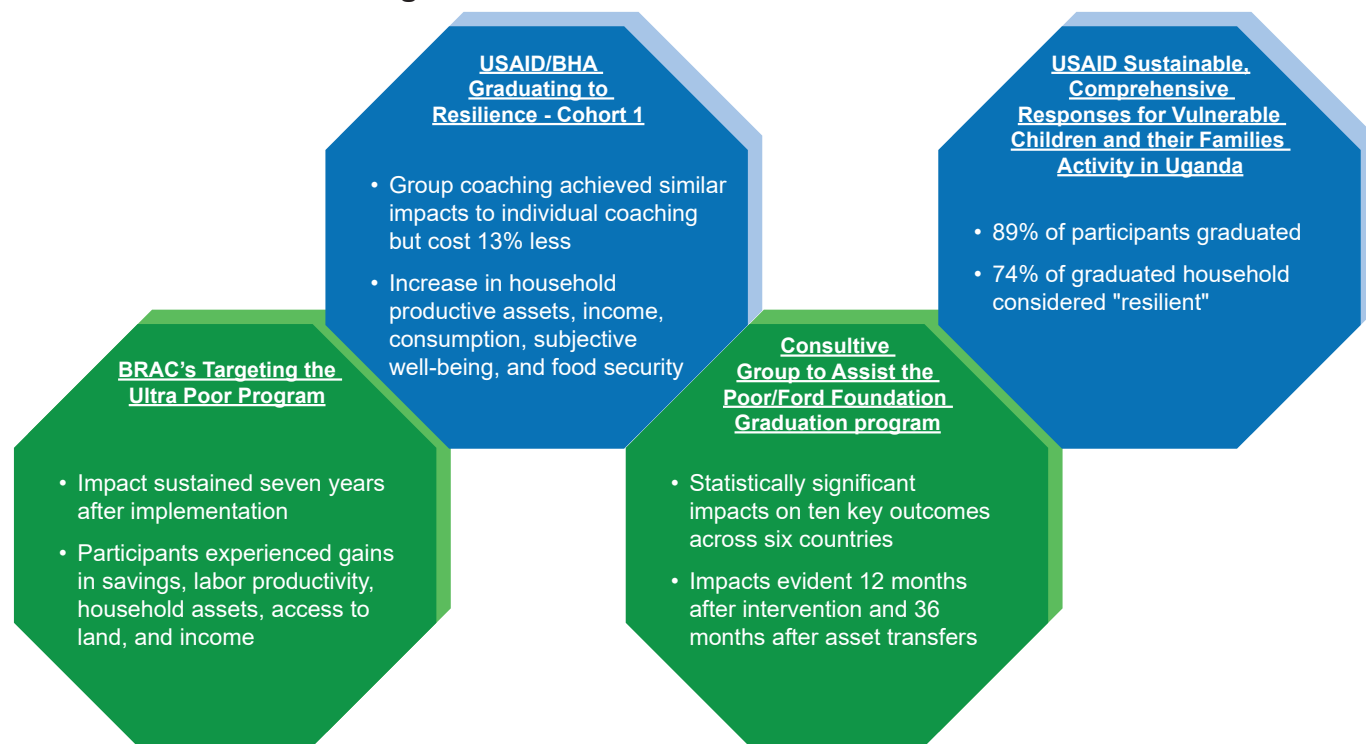
Balancing Time and Participation to Achieve Graduation



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) sought 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 graduation approach centers around four pillars: social protection, livelihoods promotion, financial inclusion, and social empowerment. Global evidence indicates that the graduation approach is effective in helping households escape from poverty and improve their quality of life (Exhibit 1). Findings from a follow up study conducted by the Activity indicate that **62% of households that had graduated at the end of Cohort One were still meeting the graduation criteria 18 months after implementation ended.** These successes contribute to reducing poverty as well as building self-sufficiency and resilience.

Exhibit 1. Graduation Program Successes



While proven effective, given the comprehensive nature of the graduation approach, it requires significant commitment, both in time and effort, from participants to achieve the benefits of the intervention. Activity participants were expected to attend weekly group meetings which included trainings, coaching, savings group meetings, and G-IPT sessions. On average, participants spent six to seven hours a week engaging in Activity related interventions. To better understand the time requirements of the intervention, the Activity conducted seven focus group discussions (FGD) with Activity participants to explore how primary participants integrated the Activity into their schedules, as well as explored any unintended consequences the time commitment had on gender dynamics and mental health. Findings from this exploration are meant to help inform the design and implementation of future graduation activities. Through this analysis, the following themes emerged.



THEME 1: IMPROVED TIME UTILIZATION

Overall, most participants felt that the Activity was not too difficult of a time commitment. Participants indicated that they restructured their schedules and that their families helped with household chores so they could attend the coaching sessions. The Activity household development plans and [graduation maps](#) also helped participants reallocate their time effectively. For example, one participant shared, "On the day of our group sitting, I wake up at 5:00am and prepare the children to go to school and for my husband to go to work. I do not go to the garden in the morning like I used to do before I enrolled in the project activities. I decided to postpone garden work for afternoon hours when I return from participating in the group activities." Several participants mentioned that the Activity coaches



Through coaching support participant households engaged in household planning discussion including more equal distribution of household responsibilities like chores, cooking, and childcare. Photo: AVSI.

trained them to manage their schedules based on their engagement with the Activity sessions. Nearly all respondents agreed that their participation in the Activity did not affect their time utilization at home. In fact, many respondents noted that they minimally adjusted their schedules in order to participate in coaching sessions. Another participant shared, "My involvement in project activities does not hinder my ability to handle routine responsibilities. Each day, I wake up early, prepare my children for school, and when my husband is home, he takes care of the younger child. This allows me to participate in coaching and VSLA (Village Savings and Loans Associations) activities. By the time I return, my husband helps with household chores, and I only need to prepare lunch. Therefore, there is no negative impact on my responsibilities." While engaging in the Activity required a time commitment, participants felt that the Activity did not negatively affect their time utilization.

When it comes to unintended consequences of the time commitment, participants noted positive changes in gender roles and mental health rather than negative consequences. Specifically, participants noted increased support from their husbands to help them balance participation in the Activity with household responsibilities and improved mental health from participation.



THEME 2: GREATER BALANCE IN HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

Activity participants indicated a change in their spouse's support as a result of the Activity intervention. While the participants (mainly women) attended coaching sessions, their spouses helped at home with daily chores including cooking food for the family and feeding livestock. One participant highlighted, "Previously my husband used not to support me with any household chores like cooking; however, from the time my husband and I attended the coaching session on sharing household responsibilities he has become very supportive when it comes to engaging in household responsibilities." Participants also mentioned that their spouses sometimes attended the coaching sessions, which has contributed to positive gender dynamics. One participant described, "During household touch point my husband and I learnt about conflict management and negotiation which has helped us to control conflicts in our household. In the past when my husband would use money meant for home we would fight over it. We have learnt how to resolve conflicts in an amicable way." Several participants noted a change in their spouse's behavior as a result of participating in joint sessions. One participant mentioned that before the Activity, only she would attend school meetings for her children; however, since engaging in joint coaching sessions, she and her husband learned the importance of working together. As a result of the Activity, spouses seem more engaged in household activities, committed to a more balanced gender dynamic, and supportive of their partners who attend coaching sessions.



THEME 3: ENHANCED MENTAL HEALTH

Many respondents highlighted how the Activity contributed to the improvements in their mental health. Through coaching sessions participants felt that they increased their self-efficacy and empowered them economically to help meet their children's educational needs. Participants also indicated that participating in the Activity improved their mental health in relation to household roles and responsibilities. One participant explained, "My engagement in the project activities has changed my mind set as far as the roles and responsibilities. In the past I believed that it was the sole responsibility of a man to provide school fees and shelter for the household. The change in mindset has motivated me to contribute towards the development of my household." Several participants has mentioned that through the Activity, they made lasting friendships. One participant shared, "... in the group I know that I find people there who are like my mothers, sisters, friends and we shall save as well as discuss which makes me happy." Lastly, participants highlighted that the Activity strengthened their belief in themselves to achieve their goals. Through coaching sessions and the utilization of graduation maps, participants continuously tracked their progress in meeting their short- and long-term goals. Participants felt proud of themselves when they achieved their goals.

The findings from the FDG's suggest that despite the time commitment required to participate in graduation programming, participants' found their engagement to be meaningful and helped them to better manage their time, more actively work with other household members to share responsibilities, and enhanced their feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment. The powerful narratives that participants shared highlight the power the graduation approach has on promoting behavior change. Donors and implementing partners looking to adapt the graduation approach should understand the time requirements of programming and help integrate behavior change strategies into implementation to help participants overcome any potential time barriers to participation.



Coaches worked with households to use the graduation map to set their goals and plan out the steps needed to get there. This often led to a discussion about how to allocate household resources, including household members time, to achieve the goals. Photo: AVSI.