The Bab Amal Program, modeled on BRAC's Graduation approach, aims to reduce poverty in rural Egypt by targeting 2,400 extreme poor households in Assiut and Sohag, the poorest governorates in the country. BRAC’s Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative is providing technical assistance on the program in partnership with Sawiris Foundation for Social Development (SFSD), Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), and two implementing NGOs, Giving Without Limits Association (GWLA), and the Egyptian Human Development Association (EHDA).

**What are we doing during the COVID-19 crisis?**

**Extending consumption support**

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, extreme poor households that were not enrolled in the government cash transfer schemes, Takaful and Karama, received a monthly stipend of 400 EGP (24 USD) for a six month period to meet their basic needs. With the onset of the pandemic, the Bab Amal program extended the stipend for two months to ensure food security and mitigate the impact of reduced household income on consumption. Households also received a month’s worth of food transfers from the program. Those on Takaful and Karama will receive an increased cash transfer as part of an emergency initiative by the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

GWLA and EHDA staggered the delivery of stipends to prevent crowding at the post office collection centers. This involves releasing the stipend for a small number of households per day and having one representative collect the amount on behalf of everyone.

**Savings and loan activities**

The Bab Amal program includes Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), consisting of 10-15 members who meet on a bi-weekly basis to deposit savings, borrow, and learn about financial literacy from facilitators.

Since April, the group meetings have been suspended to avoid gathering of people in their communities. To encourage participants to continue saving, facilitators have started collecting savings during monthly household visits.
Coaching through phone calls and socially distanced household visits

A critical component of the Bab Amal program is coaching through group and individual meetings, where facilitators guide and mentor participants on social and health messaging, livelihoods management, and household welfare, and monitor their progress. For a short period in April, GWLA and EHDA suspended a majority of the bi-weekly household visits and adapted the coaching content for sharing through regular phone calls between facilitators and participants. As the lockdown has eased, facilitators are conducting monthly household visits with precautions, and follow-up phone calls to provide participants the guidance and encouragement they need during this challenging period.

Raising health and hygiene awareness in communities

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, participants received like skills training through the bi-weekly savings group meetings. With the suspension of group meetings, facilitators are reinforcing training on topics such as personal health and hygiene, social distancing, and use of protective equipment (masks and gloves) to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The messaging aligns with the health training curriculum provided by the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Health.

Linking households with government and community support

The sustainability of program outcomes depends on the linkages between households and existing government and community resources. These linkages are even more critical in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis as households face economic and health challenges. The Bab Amal program is connecting households to government and community initiatives that provide food aid and hygiene kits. In addition, SFSD, GWLA, and EHDA are engaging the Ministry of Social Solidarity to include participants who are currently not registered in Takaful and Karama as the ministry plans to expand coverage to 60,000 additional households.

Administering a COVID-19 diagnostic survey

J-PAL is administering a brief survey to determine the impact of the pandemic on households. The survey aims to track changes in food intake, livelihood status, use of savings, and borrowing behavior. It complements monitoring information on livelihood growth and health status that facilitators collect during regular household visits and phone calls. The findings will further tailor the COVID-19 response to the immediate needs of participating households.

What comes next?

As the situation rapidly evolves, the program team will continue to be proactive and adapt to household needs through several steps:

- **Continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Social Solidarity**, local government, and development partners to reinforce health messaging.
- **Advocate for emergency resources** for participating households based on the needs identified in the diagnostic assessment.
- **Develop tools and training** to equip households to rebuild their disrupted livelihoods as they transition to a stable recovery.

For a full overview of our Bab Amal Graduation pilot, please visit [http://bracultrapoorgraduation.org/project/egypt/](http://bracultrapoorgraduation.org/project/egypt/)