BRAC Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative

2020 Strategic Vision

The need to combat extreme poverty and drive systems change has never been more urgent. We must act swiftly and design programs and policies that meet the increasing and evolving needs of the extreme poor - programs and policies that are comprehensive, adaptive, and immediate but for long-term needs - to build resilience and support sustainable economic recovery.

Scaling a Solution Proven to Break the Poverty Trap

BRAC’s Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative (UPGI), an initiative of BRAC, received a large-scale grant to apply toward its goal of scaling BRAC’s Ultra-Poor Graduation approach to help 21 million more people lift themselves from extreme poverty by 2026, with a particular focus in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Pioneered by BRAC in 2002, the Graduation approach is a scalable, time-bound, and sequenced set of interventions based on a deep understanding of the unique and ever-changing challenges faced by those living at a severe level of extreme poverty. The program aims to adapt to local challenges and opportunities and ‘graduate’ people from extreme poverty into sustainable livelihoods and long-term resilience. Internationally recognized and rigorously researched, Graduation is a proven solution to break the poverty trap for the long-term - the flagship program in Bangladesh has already graduated over 2 million households over the past 18 years. BRAC UPGI is building on the success of the flagship Ultra-Poor Graduation Program in Bangladesh.

Driving Systems Change with Governments at the Helm

Building off the long-term success of the Graduation program in Bangladesh, BRAC has directly implemented and provided technical assistance on Graduation in 13 additional countries over the last 18 years, further expanding its reach. Additionally, more than 100 partners in 50 countries have piloted or implemented Graduation and together graduated 3.1 million households. BRAC UPGI is scaling Graduation through integration in existing government programs and policies related to poverty reduction, social protection, and economic inclusion, including cash transfers and inclusive livelihood programs. To ensure sustainable impact, BRAC UPGI will increase our work with government actors and global policymakers to promote the scaling and adoption of the Graduation approach through comprehensive policy and systems change.

Influencing Global Policies and Programs: At a global level, BRAC UPGI will work with multilateral institutions and strategic partners to ensure global policies and programs promote a focus on the world’s poorest people through evidence-based social and economic inclusion programmes.

Promoting Effective Policies and Programming at the National Level: At a country-level, BRAC UPGI will work with a selection of governments and partners to reach 21 million more people through

ADAPTING GRADUATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

BRAC UPGI has been providing advisory services and technical support to governments of varying capacities across Africa and Asia for the last 18 years, integrating Graduation into existing social protection systems to make them more expansive and inclusive for the poorest people. BRAC UPGI’s team has worked with government partners in the Philippines, Kenya, Rwanda, Lesotho, Guinea, Zambia, India, and Pakistan, among others, adapting the approach in each country to fit the local context and effectively integrate into existing government programming and policies.

Here is a case in point. Since 2016, BRAC UPGI has been supporting the integration of the approach into the Philippines government’s livelihoods and cash transfer programming...
government-led Graduation programs and policies by 2026. BRAC will work closely with policymakers to promote the scaling and adoption of the Graduation approach at a large scale by enhancing the design and execution of programs targeting extreme poor populations, partnering and engaging with key stakeholders to sustain local support and investment in the nation’s commitment to ending extreme poverty through the Graduation approach.

**Driving Learning and Innovation:** BRAC UPGI will complement these efforts with a robust learning agenda that will contribute to global evidence on ending extreme poverty, adapting the Graduation approach for various poverty contexts, and scaling effectively and efficiently by governments. BRAC UPGI plans to work with a vibrant community of actors, including research firms and evaluation partners, dedicated to fighting extreme poverty through Graduation and similar approaches, including governments, research institutions, local civil society, and multilateral institutions.

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The level of effort, programming, resources, and tenacity required to eradicate extreme poverty vastly exceeds the capabilities of a single organization or the Audacious investment. To truly eliminate poverty in all its forms, BRAC urges governments, multilateral institutions, donors, NGOs, and policymakers to work together more effectively and commit significantly more resources.”

- Lindsay Coates, Managing Director, of BRAC UPGI

At BRAC we believe it is unjust that hundreds of millions of people around the world lack access to food, clean water, education, health care, and a steady income. We stand with those most affected by pervasive inequality and most at risk of being left behind as an act of justice -- not of charity.

through a Graduation pilot in Negros Occidental province. The Department of Labor and Employment launched the program in partnership with the Asian Development Bank and technical assistance from BRAC to target 1,800 beneficiaries of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* cash transfer program in 32 barangays across five municipalities. The pilot aims to provide participant households with a comprehensive and sequenced set of interventions to place them on an upward trajectory into sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

In response to COVID-19 and its economic impact on the Philippines, we have worked with partners on the ground to swiftly adapt the government’s pilot to protect participants’ livelihoods, basic needs, and social welfare. To do this, we increased the use of digital technologies to share information and tips from local health officials on hygiene, illness, and prevention; modified coaching methodologies to accommodate social distancing and community support networks; enhanced relationships with local government authorities for greater visibility and support; and strengthened linkages to available public services.

A recent assessment shows that 99 percent of participants reported a high understanding of hygiene awareness, 93 percent received cash from the national government, and 89 percent continued income generation during lockdown by having livelihoods designed to be easily adaptable and shock resistant. These findings help demonstrate Graduation’s ability to make existing government programs more inclusive, adaptive, and comprehensive, resulting in greater resilience for participants to withstand major shocks and continue to improve their lives.