

Graduation and the SDGs- A Multidimensional Approach to Addressing Extreme Poverty

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established a vision of a world free of poverty and inequality by 2030. Unfortunately, progress towards the SDGs is at great risk. The international community has struggled to reach the most pressing goals, including **SDG 1, ending poverty in all its forms**. COVID-19 threatens to unravel a decade of progress in human development and force 88-115 million more people into extreme poverty. As we enter the Decade of Action, the global community must commit to investments in proven solutions, policies, and systems that ensure the most marginalized populations are not left behind. **Graduation approach is one such proven development intervention that is uniquely positioned to break the poverty trap long-term, with a holistic approach that catalyzes impact for multiple SDGs at once.**

SDG 1: No Poverty



Ending extreme poverty is at the core of BRAC's mission. Recognizing that existing poverty alleviation programs were not reaching the poorest people, BRAC pioneered the Ultra-Poor Graduation

approach in Bangladesh in 2002 and adapted it across 13 other countries, reaching 9 million people to date. More than 100 partners in nearly 50 countries have since implemented the Graduation approach, reaching 14 million people worldwide. **In BRAC's flagship Graduation program in Bangladesh, 95 percent of program participants made socio-economic gains through sustainable livelihoods and continued on an upward trajectory more than seven years after the initial asset transfer.** This asset transfer nearly doubled the participant's baseline wealth, which only continued to increase as the income and savings generated during the program enabled a transition to sustainable livelihoods.

SDG 2: Zero Hunger



Graduation enables participants to increase food security and reduce malnutrition for themselves and their families. The program promotes better nutrition knowledge, access to nutritious meals, homestead gardening,

and behavioral changes like increased duration of exclusive breastfeeding. **In a Graduation program in Haiti, the number of food insecure households declined by over 50 percent by the program's end despite consumption support ending 10 months earlier and shocks like a national food crisis and major earthquake during implementation.** In Bangladesh, the program's nutritional

coaching not only improved maternal and child nutrition behaviors for participants, but spilled over to positively impact the nutrition behaviors of non-participants as well.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being



Life skills training and access to health services encourage behavior change among Graduation participants and build their resilience against health-related shocks.

Participants from Graduation pilots across six countries reported significant improvements in mental and physical health and well-being, with another study showing that these effects last seven years after the program's start. The Graduation approach has been adapted to address the current global pandemic response

Graduation addresses multiple drivers of exclusion and deprivation to ensure **no one is left behind**



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1 NO POVERTY 	Graduation scaled within national social protection programs aim to end extreme poverty by 2030.
2 ZERO HUNGER 	Productive Asset Transfer and Technical Training to promote sustainable livelihoods and access to food.
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	Life-Skills Training and Access to Health Services encourages behavior change and builds resilience against sudden health-related shocks.
5 GENDER EQUALITY 	Savings, Mentoring and Social-Inclusive Activities to promote gender equality and empowerment.
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	Cross-Sectoral Linkages to increase the productivity of the extreme poor, contributing to economic growth.
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 	Multidimensional Targeting and Graduation Criteria to progressively realize basic rights for the extreme poor.
13 CLIMATE ACTION 	Build resilience against climate-related shocks and mitigation to existing threats.

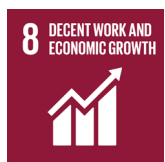
across Bangladesh, the Philippines, Egypt, Uganda, and Liberia, where it successfully targeted participants with health messaging and connected them to government support.

SDG 5: Gender Equality



Savings, mentorship, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion activities support gender equality and empowerment for extreme poor women. **The Graduation approach can empower female participants at both the household level, improving their access to livelihoods and their relationships with spouses and family members, as well as at the community level where women become visible in areas they previously had limited access to such as community leadership.** Women participating in BRAC's Graduation program in Bangladesh were more likely to report perceived improvement in their economic and social status, sense of self-confidence, and household gender dynamics compared to non-participants.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth



Participants receive support to establish sustainable livelihoods, financial stability, and economic development. **Seven years after initial asset transfers in the program in Bangladesh, participating households continued to experience long-term gains including an increase of 37 percent in earnings, a 10 percent increase in consumption, a ninefold increase in savings rate, and a doubling of household asset value and access to land.** Research by LSE and UNDP suggests that scaling the Graduation approach nationally through government systems could drive inclusive development by bringing previously marginalized groups into markets and connecting them to livelihoods, thus raising both aggregate supply and demand at the macroeconomic level.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities



The complex needs of people living in extreme poverty are the result of deeply-rooted inequalities and marginalization. Analysis of the seven-year study of Graduation in Bangladesh identified the existence of a poverty trap, in which extremely poor people have no option but to work in low productivity jobs and have fundamentally unequal access to opportunities. **The analysis also found that the Graduation program effectively broke the poverty trap and enabled participants to continue on an upward economic trajectory long after the program ended.**

SDG 13: Climate Action



BRAC UPGI has adapted the Graduation approach to support communities impacted by climate change through mitigation, adaptation, and resilience measures. Climate-resilient livelihoods and training build the adaptive capacity of people in extreme poverty to respond to major shocks, including those due to climate change. **In a BRAC-assisted program led by Fonkoze in Haiti, two-thirds of participants sustained progress or made further gains even four years after the program, despite devastating impacts of two major hurricanes that wiped out livestock and harvests the year before evaluation.** Evidence from programs in Pakistan impacted by severe floods showed that participants still made gains just one year after the program and experienced little or no decline in the positive impact of the program on their consumption, household assets, and food security.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals



Numerous SDG coalitions exist to drive ambitious action by 2030, yet there is no sustained and coordinated effort on reaching SDG 1 for ending poverty at a global level. BRAC UPGI is driving efforts to build South-South partnerships and coalitions to increase global coordination and visibility for Graduation notably through our work with the Partnership for Economic Inclusion at the World Bank to enhance knowledge, learning, and sharing of evidence on Graduation programs.

Referred to as **“the best buy in development”** by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (previously DFID) and the **‘big push’** needed for people in extreme poverty by Nobel Prize-winning economist Abhijit Banerjee, **the Graduation approach is one of the few development interventions that breaks the poverty trap for the long term** by ensuring inclusion and equality within the community through asset transfer, occupation change, access to financial services, and social empowerment.

