Kampala, Uganda
September 25 - 29, 2023
Introduction

AVSI Foundation – a learning entity has held presence in the humanitarian and development programming in Uganda for decades with its involvement in steering interventions that dignify the value of the person and their own development evident. The Graduation Approach is among the timely approaches that have manifested great success in building sustainable livelihoods of communities and as part of the Livelihoods and Self-reliance Sector working group, Economic Inclusion working group, Partnership for Economic Inclusion, and Poverty Alleviation Coalition, AVSI Foundation together with Trickle Up and American Institutes for Research have partnered in piloting and implementing the approach through the seven-year USAID-funded Graduating to Resilience Activity that seeks to graduate 13,200 extremely poor households in Kamwenge District of southwestern Uganda from conditions of vulnerability to self-reliance and resilience.

The five-day Graduation Approach training of more than 70 participants from across Africa was timely in building capacity of participants in graduation programming.

The timely intervention has proven successful in empowering individuals and communities with tools and knowledge to break free from the cycle of poverty. Logistical notes and training objectives were shared with participants at the commencement of the Graduation Approach training aimed to aid participants to:

- Learn about the Graduation Approach, its key features, components, and measurements.
- Share the Graduation Approach implementation experiences from both humanitarian and development contexts.
- Share results of the Graduation Approach model.
- Appreciate and scale the Graduation Approach in various contexts.
- Connect to resources - communities of practice and resource materials.
Remarks from John Makoha, the AVSI Foundation in Uganda Country Representative

John Makoha, acknowledged participation of the experts in the room, which sets the stage for sharing experiences on actions in the humanitarian and development sector. He accentuated the learning, refinements, successes that AVSI Foundation, Trickle Up, American Institutes for Research and Innovations for Poverty Action have experienced particularly in implementing the Graduating to Resilience Activity with refugees and host communities in Southwestern Uganda.

In his acknowledgement of the American People’s generosity in uplifting people to self-reliance, Makoha expressed the need for a scale up of the Graduation Approach model, encouraging organizations to build synergies for interventions towards improving the lives of vulnerable communities.

“In all our interventions, we conduct tests and are open to learning what works and what may not be successful in a given community.”
Communication from

Rita Larok, the AVSI Foundation Graduation Approach Focal Person, Chief of Party for the USAID-Graduating to Resilience Activity, and advisory member of the Partnership for Economic Inclusion.

The diverse experiences among the training participants was noteworthy. Rita Larok encouraged participants to interact and wished them a successful training experience. She re-iterated the importance of the timing of the training, indicating that as resources continue to reduce while the evidence of a successful approach increases, it is not only ideal but critical to conduct such trainings to ensure that the approach is scaled up towards transitioning an increasing ultra-poor population to self-reliance and resilience.

“The effectiveness of the approach makes it timely for scale-up.”
Graduation Model – Concepts and Features

The Graduation model is a sequenced, tailored, multi-sectoral and time-bound package of interventions that is proven to build self-reliance and resilience.

Pretest session

An online pretest session to evaluate participant’s understanding of the Graduation Approach was introduced and the test found that overall participants scored on average 44% and at post test had scored 76% showing a tremendous improvement.

An Activity video was part of the resources presented to share insights into the Graduation Approach. The following observations and comments emanated from the participants;

• The Graduation Approach has several features and components.
• The approach needs personalized coaching to deliver the activities and to motivate the household.
• The approach can work in any context including emergency.
• Graduation Approach is delivered primarily through a coach and trainer all of whom work to build household resilience.
• It is a tested and effective model for addressing populations living in extreme poverty.
• The approach involves an initial cost investment that appears high even though the results and benefits may outweigh the cost of investment.

The main features in the Graduation Approach were noted as below:

• Targeting extremely poor and vulnerable households.
• Time-bound.
• Multi-sectoral.
• Family tailored pathways.
• Measurement of vulnerability/extreme poverty and setting graduation thresholds.
Rita Larok also shared the following additional features of a Graduation Approach:

- Households take part in economic activities directly and are economically included.
- Participants are engaged in a series of activities which are multi-sectoral.
- It brings together many sectors and targets families.
- The approach employs sequenced activities crucial for attaining resilience.
- Time-bound; Graduation programs must start and end.
- It targets and works with those who are extremely poor and or ultra-poor.
- It involves engaging in sustainable livelihoods.
- Graduation approaches target women and youth as primary participants and entry points into engaging the entire household.
- Some activities such as coaching run throughout the implementation period (coaching, linkages, saving and financial inclusion)
- An integrated package of interventions in graduation approaches are composed of six basic components; saving, coaching, linkages, consumption support, asset transfer, technical skills training and business coaching.
- Enrolling the wrong target of participants could lead to graduation program failure.
- Costs can be reduced when implemented at scale with larger numbers of households.
- Relative cost is lower than traditional programing over time: **2$ per day for 24 months per household of 6.**
- Graduation approach needs both community-based trainers and coaches for a holistic intervention.
- Graduation approaches can be adapted in different contexts although the components remain the same.
Emerging questions:

- What is consumption support?
- What is the appropriate number of participants per coaches?
- How does the family benefit when targeting the woman?
- For how long should post-graduation assessments be conducted?
- Is preparing coaches part of the first 18 months of project life
- What are the qualities of the coaching, what is the depth of the coaching, does a coach need to have all the skills in all areas?
- Do you tell the people to undertake livelihoods in relation to the market assessments?
- How do you target to minimize dropouts for example of refugees where there is resettlement?
- What do participants say about the graduation approach?
Recap + Parenting (A Coaching Topic)

The day started with an introduction to parenting – a coaching topic, that emerged exciting among the participants.

Rita Larok noted that parenting is a skill critical for every participant and she conducted a pretest to evaluate participant’s comprehension of parenting skills, explaining to participants the need for acquisition of parenting skills even amidst the current era where parents are away from home.

Below are some conclusions from the parenting session:

• Work towards being that authoritative parent and get help if you need it.
• Parents are agents of socialization.
• Children emulate their parents and thus the need to have positive parents who can be role models/source of education for their children.
• Children can be affected physically and psychologically when they live in violent homes and thus the need for stable families.
• Parents give what they are.
• Children are unique and will behave differently. Getting to know your own child, and knowing what makes them angry or agitated can help you prevent angry or upsetting situations before they happen. Your child will behave in a challenging way for several reasons.

Key feedback from participants included the desire to understand;

• How can one enroll for parenting sessions?
• How has AVSI Foundation been presenting such parenting sessions to vulnerable households with disintegrated families?
• Has the training been delivered to staff?
• Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development representative noted that; Uganda adopted the national parenting training manual and invited organizations to actively participate.
The Targeting Process

by John Paul Nyeko.

Program participants are selected through the “Score Card” and “Bucketing” sessions and the Participatory Rural Appraisal that involves communities in defining economic classes. The Participatory Rural Appraisal promotes ownership and sustainability of the program interventions since the community members know themselves best.

Emerging questions:

• How does the program target people with disability for inclusion?
• Can interventions that target the vulnerable and economically in-active who may not benefit from programs that are not inclusive be considered?
• Are there biases and misrepresentations in responses during bucketing such as the size of land?
• Did the program encounter any challenges using the probability poverty index tool to compliment the Participatory Rural Appraisal when you piloted? Was it dropped?
• What is the justification or rationale for Poverty Wealth Ranking?
• Is it possible to use one measurement - score card tool instead of the bucketing or both?
• How are participants that drop out of the program replaced, if at all?
• What method is used to capture biometric data when targeting?

Participants appreciated the Graduating to Resilience Activity targeting method as having been comprehensively delivered, and thanked AVSI Foundation and its partners for the great work and insights as they reflected on the following points on the Participatory Rural Appraisal targeting approach:

• Enhances community buy-in and ownership – Accountability to affected populations.
• Community understands the targeting process and become supportive.
• Reduces potential conflict and is a transparent process
• Increases trust and is locally centered – community constructs of extreme poverty are integrated and prepares the household for success.
• Reduces dropout and increases long-term sustainability.
Coaching

by Innocent Cwinyai.

The coaching session was facilitated by Innocent Cwinyai who called upon Didier Kasiwa, a coach in the USAID Graduating to Resilience Activity who shared his experience of how coaching is done. Participants were asked to reflect on what coaching meant and the feedback was largely centered on the words support and mentors.

Emerging questions:

- How do coaches work together?
- What makes one an exceptionally skilled coach for great performance?
- How can coaches transition in career growth? What is a coach’s goal?
- Do staff get psychosocial support to counter their work with traumatized categories?
- What other structures do coaches belong to that offer support?
- What are the learnings from coach experiences?
- Do coaches create other leaders/coaches amongst their groups? Can groups operate post-coaching?

“I have been able to help families evade poverty because of the good relationship I built with them. Using available resources, I enriched my understanding of coaching and working with vulnerable communities to achieve resilience.”

— Didier.
Radio - The Movie About Coaching:

Participants were also treated to a movie – ‘Radio’ that portrays a football coach, Jones who meets the 23-year-old Robert ‘Radio’ Kennedy and notices his limitations and shortcomings. He takes him under his wing and mentors him to become the future lifetime renown coach of the prestigious club. Below are some reflections from the movie:

- Coach had a constrained relationship with his family and community – symbolically coaches can get overwhelmed with a magnitude work and need support – weekly structure for meetings, self-care activities, pairing a coach with a trainer.
- Radio is not defined by his circumstances – coach Jones starts from the value of the person not from his challenges. He ignores the time he took the ball from his team – symbolic of the AVSI approach in the way we work.
- As a coach - several cases will manifest beyond one’s direct target – coach Jones goes beyond his direct target and focuses on Radio.
- Sometimes coaches may be pressured to obey rules against the right approach or response – coaches should be able to rise above these scenarios.
- It’s not the name - it’s the person and as such Radio became the name/something he loved and as such they connected.
- Coach Jones kept close to Radio and took extra steps to understand Radio better.
- Case management takes time and involves several steps and several people – referral, various engagements.
- Exert patience – not all participants are the same and everyone starts off differently. Radio needed a different timeline.
- Radio’s confidence is built over time through coach Jones trust and support.
- The coach is a role model. For example, Radio emulated the coach and eventually became a coach in the school for the rest of his life.
- Self determination – coach Jones did not dictate what Radio should do. We see him saying “It is a good burger ….” He does not force Radio to become or do things outside of his capacity.
- Coach Jones like many coaches sometimes starts from the problem – we see this when the coach asks Radio’s mother – “what is wrong with Radio?” And the mother says nothing. “He is only slower than many his age.” At this point coach Jones starts to see Radio a lot differently – individualization.
Linkages and Referrals
by Robinah Nannungi and Marvin Patrick Odoch.

The referral and linkages pathway that highlights the value of engaging market actors and make the needed linkages to markets and goods and services in the graduation approach since no program can address all the needs of program participants.

Emerging questions:
- Who meets and links households with the other market actors?
- Are the none targeted population referred for services?
- How are referrals fairing against a nonfunctional referral system?
- Do referrals and linkages help participants to graduate?
- How does the contractual arrangement work within referrals and linkages with other partners?
- How do pre-engagements with private sector work?
- How do you ensure market actors do not exploit participants?

The presentation also included a story explained through the animation of a character named Claudine, which highlighted the overwhelming needs of vulnerable communities that no single partner or program may address to totality.
Savings
by Baptist Acellam

A pretest on the different models of saving was conducted to test the training participants on the different models of saving and the need for each individual to save funds, knowing the different options and benefits for each model was emphasized.

Emerging questions:
• How are participant’s savings tracked?
• Which other tools are used to ensure people are consistent with saving?
• How is the saving culture sustained?
• When is the maturity of the group for the linkages to the bank assessed?
• How is the saving group’s interest rate determined?
• What are the payment terms for loans in the Village Saving and Loans Association?
• What is the average individual cash-out amount at end of the cycle?
• How are savings for the poor who have no sources of income initiated?
• Group formation - new groups or existing group. How can double counting be eliminated?
• How can savings/cost of digitalization be tracked?
• What maturity assessment tools and financial literacy is applied
• What is the group: community-based trainer ratio?

Asset Transfer and Consumption Support

Questions emerged in the following areas:
• Inflation rates and withdrawal charges considerations
• Recipients: individually or a target person or household.
• Monitoring and reactions of the participants post asset transfer.
• Transactional costs in comparison the transferred amounts.
• How to manage dependency.
Recap

A recap on the graduation approach sessions that including; preliminary activities - targeting, coaching, saving, referral and linkages, asset transfer, consumption support, livelihood skills training, and selection planning and management was conducted.

A skills exercise taken from the coaching curriculum on how to develop a graduation map was conducted. This enabled participants to appreciate the importance of planning and the different pathways onto which program participants develop their short-term goals and how they can measure them weekly and monthly. The training participants filled their own maps and appreciated one of the main ways coaching is conducted with tools such as the graduation map to build self-efficacy.

A representative from USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance - Chip Bury thanked participants for participating in the training and emphasized that the goal of the training was to work toward an acceptable minimum standard of the Graduation Approach which can be adapted to various contexts and scaled while maintaining these standards/fidelity for an effective graduation program.

Core Technical trainings

This session was delivered by Robinah and Marvin and covered the topics; financial literacy, enterprise selection planning and management, farmer field and business schools.
# Financial Literacy, Selection Planning and Management, Earn As You learn Apprenticeship model:

**by Marvin Patrick Odoch.**

Components of the graduation approach as part of the core technical skills are important for all participants as long as they have to undertake a business pathway. The Earn As You Learn Apprenticeship model tremendously reduces participant dropout and ensures that youth participants are well engaged and are paid as they learn.

## Emerging questions and observations:

- Are spouses involved in planning before the disbursement?
- What happens when the business is not making profits?
- What informs the technical skills training?
- Who delivers the business canvas model to the participants?
- How do land tenure systems work in the refugee settlement?
- How do the illiterates fill out the canvas business plan?
- Are there restrictions for participants on how they should use the asset transfer cash?
- What incentives does the program provide for work-based learning?
- Do the youth apprentices participate in financial literacy, Village Saving and Loans Associations, and selection planning and management trainings?
- Is the asset transfer also used to pay for apprenticeship and business?
- What is the difference between Earn As You learn and work-based learning?
- Can the program ensure the Directorate of Industrial Training certification? Response: certification is the long way of getting the youth into job market. Many apprentices get retained or utilize Village Saving and Loans Associations to start a business. The success of apprenticeship is based on the market assessment.
Recap

A skills exercise taken from the coaching curriculum in the life skills component called ‘testing the waters’ was conducted. Training participants understood whether they were a) plungers, b) delayrs, c) waders and or d) testers. The exercise was linked to individual reactions and behavior in varying situations and their effects.

Participants also reflected on some of the following themes:

• When designing the graduation program, the woman plus approach was considered which worked as a family approach.
• When enrolling, the program mainly looked for households with a woman or youth (female or male) as an entry point.
• Most of the households had women or youth and hence there was inclusion.
• Asset transfer ensured that the cash goes to the primary participant who is the woman or youth.
• Ensure proper sensitization before asset transfer to mitigate cash-instigated issues in the family.
• Some patriarchal contexts limit women phone-ownership. It is important to sensitize such communities before providing phones to women.
Business Coaching

This session explored business coaching as a process of engaging in regular and structured conversations with business owners about their business plan(s), both in a mentorship capacity and technical capacity. The session covered why conduct business coaching?

- The top four reasons listed for business failure are; lack of demand, rigid owners, inability to manage growth, and poor accounting.
- The program participants’ success rate is not only dependent on the market forces and their entrepreneurial abilities but also on being able to access the right support and technical know-how at the right time.
- Business Coaching is an ideal and tested approach to supporting small enterprises.

Emerging questions:

- Most businesses seem to be agricultural-related. Is there similar coaching for businesses such as restaurants or do they require a different business coaching package?
- Are there guiding questions for community-based trainers to use while coaching?
- What are the community-based trainers’ qualifications?
- What is the proportionate cost of business coaching versus all the components?
- How long do community-based trainers undergo training, and coach the participants on businesses?
- Who collects data on performance of business?
- How do coaches balance time for business coaching, coaching and data collection?
- Are coaches and community-based trainers remunerated equally, or not, and why?
- Do community-based trainers review the business plans made by participants?
- Does the Activity have minimum standards to guide businesses in agriculture and animal husbandry?
- What is the difference between agronomy-based training and normal coaching?
Other Thematic Areas

Market Systems Development, Environment and Climate, Gender and Youth

These themes were covered in an innovative group of exercises that were concluded with reflection discussions:

- Challenging participants to shop puzzles in the back of the room and use them to assemble a product for sale – Market Systems Development.
- Using picture posters and myth exercises for gender.
- Presentation of key considerations on climate and environment from the theory of change and the activities implemented.

Similarly, a session on measurement and learning including accountability to affected populations where various tools were shared and the Theory of Change approach presented to illustrate how AVSI tracks and uses its monitoring data to complement graduation data and determine results in a triangulated manner was conducted.

The use of collaborating, learning and adaptation (CLA) was shared with specific examples given to show how the activity proactively developed learning questions and how the learning is tracked and used to make adaptive changes. For monitoring, evaluation results from different assessments including the graduation criteria and tools were shared – leading participants to appreciate having a robust monitoring system for an effective graduation approach program.
Question and Answer Session - Panel:

Toward the end of the training, the facilitators formed a panel to respond to participants’ pending questions;

• From your experience of post-graduation, are there participants who retrogress to their initial situations, and how many of these cases were identified

• Risk management needs to be put into consideration since we focus on food security, how do you employ the country disaster approach?

• Why is it important for participants to understand their measurement?

• Will a participant graduate if they do not meet the criteria in the subsequent quarter?

• How was apprenticeship conducted and how were youth transited into the job market?

The last sessions of the training included:
- A post-test exercise where an overall score of 76% on average was attained.
- Linkages to various resource platforms and materials including:
  o Poverty Alleviation Coalition (PAC).
  o Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PEI).
  o Resilience Links.
  o FSN Network.
  o Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative.
  o The Cash Learning Partnership (CALP) Network.
  o The Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS).
  o Uganda Learning, Evidence, Accountability and Research Network.
  o Working Groups.

Participants were offered a link to register for additional technical resources:
Participant Feedback

“AVSI has demonstrated that this is a promising approach to graduating vulnerable communities from extreme poverty to self-reliance and resilience and you have been generous to share this knowledge. AVSI Foundation is also part of the Self-reliance Measurement Reference Group.”


“I never knew how to access materials about such programming but now I have several that I can interact with.”

Gabriel Idoko, UNHCR.

“Adult learning can be difficult, but this training and the vibrance of the team kept us going for the five days and was very enriching.”

Mary Mbuve, BOMA.
Participant Feedback

“We hope to learn more in terms of monitoring, from the resources and collaborate beyond the partnership we have created. AVSI should share more evidence that the model works.”

Marion Mbabazi Sandra, Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development.

“You have been generous to share your experience in the implementation of the seven-year program. I commend USAID who is the funder of the program for supporting you to share these experiences.”

Bhindi Jhaveri, Grameen Foundation.

“The first time I heard of Graduation Approach, I was in Kenya but I didn’t like it. This session has showed me what the approach is and how it connects to the core of development.”

Al-Habib Onifade, Swisscontact Uganda.
**Training Evaluation:**

An overall training evaluation was conducted with participants reporting overall satisfaction with the training. Refer to diagram below:

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**How was the GA Training?**

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<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>My expectations were well met</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have gained requisite skills and knowledge on GA</td>
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<td>Facilitators were resourceful and great</td>
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<td>Logistics and time were great</td>
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<td>My organization will advocate /implement GA</td>
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<td>I am certain about the next steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am very happy that I came!</td>
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**Link to Training Photos**
Dr. Rita Larok
Chief of Party, Graduating to Resilience

Rita Larok is the AVSI Foundation global thematic Advisor for Graduation Approach and Economic Inclusion and a Chief of Party of the Graduating to Resilience Activity. Rita is also an advisory board member of the Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PFI). Rita has worked within the development and humanitarian space for the last 18 years in various capacities from design, implementation, learning and adaptive management in multi-sectoral themes building people’s and systems Resilience. Rita is a public health specialist and also holds a doctorate in Psychology.

Innocent Cwinyai
Deputy Chief of Party, Graduating to Resilience

Innocent Cwinyai is an expert in social work and administration and has 14+ years of experience in development, with expertise in areas such as graduation programs, economic strengthening, monitoring and evaluation, and child protection. Innocent is one of the National Child Protection Master-Trainers in Uganda.

Robinah Nannungi
Food Security and Nutrition Advisor, Graduating to Resilience

Robinah retains profession in agriculture and rural innovations, project planning and management, human nutrition with practical food security and nutrition bias. She has over 8 years practical experience in nutrition and livelihoods programs with expertise on program design and implementation in community development and humanitarian setting.

Marina Forbes
Uganda Program Manager, Trickle Up

Mara has over 10 years of experience working in international development across Sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on inclusive community-driven processes. She has experience in strategy and partnership development, program management, and learning, monitoring and evaluation processes. She holds a Masters Degree in International Affairs from The New School.

John Baptist Acellam
Livelihoods Advisor, Graduating to Resilience

John Baptist is an educationist and administrator with a background in development work and administration. A master in administration with 15 years experience of partnership development and management in relief, rehabilitation and development context. He has technical training in program design and expertise in humanitarian interventions; emergency relief programming, economic inclusion, livelihoods, education, food security, climate change, energy and environment.

Derrick Aaron Naibirwa
Research and Learning Advisor, Graduating to Resilience

Derrick is a project management professional with 12+ years of experience in the private sector and civil society. He specializes in social and health research with diverse academic background in social work & social administration, social sector planning & management, and project management. He has authored journals with institutions including the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. He now focuses on collaboration, learning, adaptation, and documentation of best practices.