

The value of Graduation's Coaching Component

by UNHCR Ecuador
Lago Agrio, Ecuador



Periodic counseling: an added value of the Graduation Model

By giving periodic counseling and continued assistance, the Graduation Model consolidates the process by which refugee families re-build their lives with sustainable and dignified livelihoods. According to participants, periodic counseling is, "what makes the difference."

Experience working with the refugee population over many years in Ecuador has shown that multiple factors can affect refugee families as they try to rebuild their lives in a new country. Family issues as well as unexpected events such as the sickness of a family member, job loss, and domestic violence can form major setbacks in a refugee's integration process into their host countries.

Because of these unexpected factors, the Graduation Model applied in Ecuador by UNHCR with technical assistance from Trickle Up includes periodic counseling, an essential component to help refugees in their pursuit of sustainable livelihoods. HIAS [the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a nonprofit organization that protects and advocates for refugees] assisted the Graduation Model's implementation, while the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) provided funding for the Ecuador pilot.

Throughout the process, which lasts from 12 to 18 months, a coach, sometimes known as a social promoter, visits households on a regular basis, offering assistance and orientation to participant households. Implementing organization HIAS provided teams of coaches to visit each refugee household. The coaches visit each household on a biweekly basis and provide the family with analysis and orientation regarding their access to basic services.



Coaches play a key role in the Graduation Model's evidence-based successes. They are often part of the refugee or host community, and in some cases were themselves participants in the past. They are well-positioned to identify risks and opportunities that permit refugee families to integrate progressively into their host community and develop livelihoods that match their skills. The coaching component of the Graduation Model provides transformative benefits to refugee families by providing information about local organizations, access to existing public and private services for which they qualify, and how refugee families may actively exercise their rights.

Aida, a 32-year old single mother of two, felt determined to set her own business in motion when she arrived in Ecuador after fleeing her home in Colombia's southwestern Putumayo department. Settling in the city of Lago Agrio in Ecuador's Sucumbíos province, Aida's first priority was to ensure her two children, 8 and 10 years old, were in school. Her 10-year old child has an intellectual disability.

“I did not know where to send the youngest to school. Thanks to the social promoter's help, we found where she could go and we got her a spot.”

“She is happy, she's being treated well, and I am focusing on how to successfully run my business.” Seven months after her arrival to Ecuador, Aida is driving her business forward with the help of the periodic counselling offered by the Graduation Model. Both of her daughters are attending school, and the family of three find themselves feeling more and more at home in Ecuador.

“My beauty parlor is just beside the house. I am able to combine my business and taking care of my daughters.”



Delicias del Pacífico: Food preparation bridges national lines

by Carolina Loza Leon in Esmeraldas
Lago Agrio, Ecuador



Delicias del Pacífico: The Reach of Seed Capital

Graduation is a sequenced, time-bound approach that helps families graduate out of extreme poverty. By including savings groups and encouraging social connections, the Graduation Model is particularly suited to help refugees rebuild sustainable livelihoods in their host countries.

It is 11:30 AM in the morning and the bustle in downtown Esmeraldas, a coastal city of 161,000 residents in northwest Ecuador, encourages many passerby to take a break and find something to eat.

Francelina, 31 years old, lives in the middle of the downtown bustle.

When she arrived to Ecuador a year ago fleeing violence from Tumaco, Colombia, one of the first things she noticed about her new neighbourhood was its lack of restaurants for passerby looking for somewhere to eat.

With this idea in mind, Francelina and her partner, Gustavo, started attending the financial education workshops offered as a component of the Graduation Model pilot designed by Trickle Up. Training modules in financial literacy offered by CRISFE, an Ecuadorian foundation whose mission is to contribute to social development, served as an essential support for households in the Ecuador pilot to engage in sustainable management of finances.

Throughout the five workshop modules Francelina and her partner attended, they found that the Graduation program's training topics on developing savings habits and setting goals proved essential to their efforts to improve their socioeconomic condition.

A goal of the Graduation program is to have households save at least 10% of their income on a continuous basis for 6 months.

While presenting on their savings goal during the workshop, Francelina met Yolanda and Jose Luis, a couple from Buenaventura in Colombia's Valle del Cauca region on Colombia's Pacific coast. During this meeting, a business idea for a restaurant that combined the goals and hopes of both couples, Delicias del Pacifico, was born.

Both of the refugee couples developed good relationships with community members in their neighborhood, and soon enough their new restaurant opened in a space lent by the workers association of Esmeraldas. Today, the workers association members are frequent regulars at Delicias del Pacifico.



By participating in the Graduation program, Francelina, Gustavo, Yolanda, and Jose Luis not only found a sustainable livelihood for themselves, they also built strong relationships with their host community.

Jose Luis explains with great enthusiasm that the preparation of Sancocho, a soup made with meat, root vegetables, and traditional spices in Ecuador and Colombia, has shown him the differences and similarities between Ecuadorian and Colombian dishes.



“For some dishes, they [the customers] like the Colombian version better; in other cases, they like the Ecuadorian version better. We see day by day what people like best.”

The preparation of food as a sustainable livelihood component of the Graduation pilot program in Ecuador has allowed these two refugee couples to create a bridge between their old home in Colombia and their new home in Ecuador.

