



LESSONS LEARNED REPORT

# Southern Africa Graduation Approach Learning Workshop

Solwezi, Zambia, **June 25-27, 2019**

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# Background

The Southern Africa Graduation Approach (SAGA) learning workshop was organized within the framework of the Building Self-Reliance for Refugees (Building Self-Reliance) program - a three-year learning and implementation initiative between Trickle Up and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with support from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM). Building Self-Reliance has three aims:

1. Support UNHCR to incorporate the Graduation Approach (GA) into its livelihoods programs,
2. Act as a learning mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of Graduation for persons of concern (PoCs), and
3. Act as a foundation for developing guidance and tools for future implementation for both UNHCR and Trickle Up.

Due to the wealth of unique experiences coming from the implementation of the Building Self-Reliance program in the Southern Africa region, the UNHCR Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA) requested support from Trickle Up to lead an interactive learning workshop with regional UNHCR and implementing partner (IP) staff from four UNHCR Operations<sup>1</sup>, all of which have been implementing GA for six months or longer.

The goals of the workshop were to facilitate the discussion and sharing of the complexities, challenges, bottlenecks, and opportunities among the SAGA Community of Practice (CoP) members; to document what worked, areas for improvement, and lessons learned; and to decide upon next steps.

Workshop participants also included NGOs and funders<sup>2</sup> interested in Graduation Approach for refugees and other persons of concern, invited by Trickle Up.

## Zambia

Zambia was the first of these four UNHCR operations to pilot Graduation with refugees, beginning in October 2017 with 105 refugee households in two settlements: Mayukwayukwa and Meheba. IP Self Help Africa (SHA) piloted the project under the Integrated Livelihoods Programme<sup>3</sup> for 18 months, through its completion in April 2019. During implementation, SHA employed eight coaches to deliver coaching support. Each participant received a minimum of K200 (\$21) and a maximum of K500 (\$51) for family sizes above 5, as Consumption Support for a duration of six months. As of August 2019,

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Malawi and CARD Malawi; UNHCR Mozambique, UNHCR Zambia including Self Help Africa and Caritas Czech in Zambia; and UNHCR Zimbabwe and GOAL Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup> Caritas Switzerland - representatives from Jordan and Chad offices, Norwegian Refugee Council - representatives from Mali and Kenya offices, Open Society Foundations and UNCDF.

<sup>3</sup> GA was implemented under this UNHCR livelihoods programme alongside other conventional livelihoods projects

participants continue to save regularly in the seven project-formed savings groups, supported by Natsave, a local microfinance institution. Caritas Czech, the new livelihoods IP in Zambia, is preparing to launch cohort two by mid-2019.

### **Zimbabwe**

The second UNHCR operation in the region to implement the GA with refugees is Zimbabwe. IP GOAL Zimbabwe kicked off the pilot of 18 months in September 2018, supporting 125 refugee households in Tongogara Refugee Camp. Participant households belong to a total of 11 savings groups, and each household receives \$13/household member/month, as per the World Food Programme's (WFP) Cash-Based Transfers (CBT) Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). GOAL Zimbabwe currently employs five coaches to deliver coaching to support to the participants. Plans to kick off a second cohort of 200-300 participants is scheduled for spring 2020.

### **Mozambique**

In August 2018, UNHCR Mozambique, in partnership with IP Kulima, a local NGO, began the implementation of an 18-month Graduation pilot with 118 participants (108 host community members and 10 refugees) in Maratane camp and its surroundings. To date, participants have received financial inclusion support, including savings group formation and financial education, and have begun savings activities. Participants are also receiving regular coaching and have been provided with monthly consumption support to meet their food needs. Plans to finalize the identification of livelihoods opportunities and the provision of core and technical trainings for the first cohort, as well as targeting/preparation for the second cohort are underway.

### **Malawi**

The Malawi operation is the most recent to begin Graduation implementation. With IP Christian Action for Relief and Development (CARD), the program started with 200 participants (120 refugees and 80 host community members), at the Dzaleka Camp and its environs in March 2019 and will last for 18 months. Twelve months of Consumption Support of \$13 will be provided through New Finance Bank. Ten coaches and two coach supervisors provide ongoing support to participants who have selected their livelihoods activities. The operation anticipates serving an additional 200 participants in the second cohort early 2020.

# Key Outcomes

Key outcomes from the workshop include:

- Seven UNHCR staff<sup>4</sup>, two UNHCR seconded staff, five IP staff, and three government officials were (re-)introduced to the basic components of the GA adapted for refugees, strengthening their capacity to implement the GA for refugees.
- Six NGO and funder participants observed and learned about UNHCR and Trickle Up's Graduation and Refugee Program in the region and in Zambia particularly (Meheba Settlement).
- Experiences, challenges, what worked and did not work, areas for improvement, lessons and next steps around nine key topics related to GA implementation were discussed:
  1. Graduation Programming
  2. Communication Strategies
  3. Coaching Supervision
  4. M&E
  5. Sustainable Program Management
  6. Scaling/Incorporating the GA into Government Programs
- The SAGA CoP agreed on next steps for a post-Trickle Up technical support strategy, including the creation of a group email address, a WhatsApp group chat, and quarterly webinars for regular knowledge and resource exchange, learning, and capacity building.

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<sup>4</sup> Malawi - 1, Mozambique - 1, Zimbabwe – 1, Zambia - 4; 2 UNHCR Secondees from Zambia and Zimbabwe; SHA - 1, GOAL Zimbabwe - 2, Caritas Czech - 2; GoZ - 3 (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Home Affairs – Commission for Refugees.)

## GRADUATION LEARNING

# Challenges, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Prior to this workshop, Trickle Up and ROSA conducted a brief survey to help understand UNHCR livelihoods staff's focal points and implementing partners' priorities for discussion and learning. These were then incorporated into the workshop agenda.

During the workshop, Trickle Up and ROSA engaged participants to gain a mutual understanding of the programs' key challenges related to GA implementation, to identify and document lessons learned, and to define next steps moving forward, following the conclusion of Trickle Up's technical assistance with the BPRM grant ending in August 2019.

Nine thematic issues emerged and are the titles of the sections that follow. For each section, we list a contextual and status update from the four programs, list major learnings around challenges and good practices, and offer recommendations from both the group and Trickle Up.

# 1. Graduation Programming

Project updates and lessons learned from each country operation were captured around the risks and/or effects of poor sequencing of GA components in each program context to achieve intended outcomes and impact.

	Challenge	Repercussion
Zambia*	There was pressure to kick off implementation before the end of 2017 in order to comply with the operation’s budgetary obligations for the year.	Participant targeting was conducted within a week, which did not allow for bringing in host communities.
		The cohort launched implementation in October—the beginning of the agricultural season, which put additional pressure on the timeline due to the need to align with the agricultural cycle.
		The components did not always follow the proper sequencing. For instance: (1) asset transfers for livelihoods promotion were provided <i>before</i> consumption support and core capacity skill building; (2) participants received asset transfer <i>before</i> livelihoods management technical skills training; (3) core and technical skills trainings were provided at the same time, rather than sequenced.
Zimbabwe**	Savings did not start until around November, and Network Engagement a little earlier.	Participants had limited time to accumulate savings, resulting in lower total savings amounts.
	The team waited on the findings from the value chain assessment conducted in December 2018 to inform participants’ livelihoods paths before conducting appropriate technical skills trainings to support the management of selected activities.	Major attrition of participants and coaches as some became engaged in side jobs, resulting in reduced engagement of some participants. Core Capacity and Technical training were sequenced almost at the same time, in February 2019.
Malawi	There seemed to be a lack of understanding on the side of UNHCR program teams about the differentiation between the Technical Skills Training topics and the Core Skills Training topics.	Some Core Capacity Trainings, which are intended to develop life skills and basic skills necessary for all participants, were omitted from the budget. The necessary attitudes, skills, and knowledge for participants to successfully participate in the Graduation program were not cultivated.
	Delay in obtaining a waiver from UNHCR HQ to provide a consumption support top-up to participants through the New Finance Bank, which is already operational in the camp.	Delays (in what was promised versus actually being delivered in the program) led to participant dissatisfaction and some hesitation to continue participation. Sensitization efforts are being made by the team and no drop-outs have yet been recorded.
Mozambique	Significant delays in identifying appropriate livelihood activities	Delays of technical skills training and asset transfer, which led to significant participant dissatisfaction, contributed to a misunderstanding of the purpose of consumption support, and led to increased suspicion of the overall project.
		Failure to align the end of consumption support with the time participants begun receiving supplemental income from their livelihood activity (although consumption support was extended for one month to reduce this gap).

\*had two design missions, as there was complete staff turnover after the first one, so Trickle Up returned to support the IP and UNHCR in this process.

\*\*started in August 2018, after spending time on socioeconomic assessment, which later informed targeting and verification.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Based on experiences drawn from the four countries, the following key lessons around program timeframes and/or sequencing of GA components, presented along with facilitation team corresponding recommendations, were identified:

Lessons Learned	Recommendations
Sequencing of components for the Graduation Approach depends on access to appropriate resources (human and financial).	Operations should retain sufficient and committed staff to ensure proper sequencing Operations should put in place sufficient and flexible financing prior to implementation launch so that resources are available when needed to ensure proper sequencing.
To achieve the right sequence of the GA components, programs need to prioritize buy-in from UNHCR senior management, GA and non-GA staff, and local authorities to keep things going smoothly.	Involve senior management and all GA and non-GA staff in project planning, including logistics, programs, and protection staff, so they understand the project and buy-in to it and their direct or indirect roles in its work plan and timeline, and for accountability. Whenever possible, include competent local authorities such as government extension agents to help control the process, and to make sure we have the right person at the right time.
Ideal timing and sequencing of the Graduation Approach is context-specific.	Key contextual considerations, such as seasonality, should be accounted for when developing the project timeline.
Lack of clear MoUs, which outline expectations and timelines with key service providers, resulted in project delays due to confusion on roles and responsibilities.	Clearly outline agreements with key service providers ahead of implementation through MOUs so that expectations and timelines are clearly established. This will reduce the risks in programming delays.
It is important to ensure that component timing and sequencing is rationalized and feasible before program launch to reduce the risk of delays in roll out. Having the right timing and sequencing helps ensure that participants have enough time to build experience and skills necessary to manage livelihoods activities and be sufficiently resilient by the end of program.	Ensure ample time for planning/inception of the GA before implementation to better anticipate challenges, reduce delays and gaps, and increase quality of implementation. Base design decisions and timelines not only on budget and availability, but also on your understanding of the Graduation Approach, your participants, existing evidence, and local context.
Attempting to conduct the Graduation Approach in a compressed timeframe may lead to overly stretched staff, which can decrease the quality of the programming.	Ensure sufficient time for implementation of the GA to allow for proper implementation by staff and so that participants can receive the right support at the right time.
Providing consumption support (or a top-up) at the beginning of implementation allows participants to participate fully in the program, protects participants' livelihoods so they can begin minimal savings (develop savings habits), and heads off or dissuades any inaccurate or false communication about the loss of consumption support, which could hamper program participation.	



## 2. Communication Strategies

A number of issues characterized communications about the GA in UNHCR refugee context.

- UNHCR, at the global level, through the Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Unit, is increasingly aware of the value of the GA as a livelihoods model for refugees living in extreme poverty. At the level of country offices this understanding is growing gradually. Some non-livelihoods country staff still see Graduation as “just another livelihoods intervention” or too expensive (and perhaps difficult) to implement, especially since it requires a lot of time before seeing tangible results.
- Some support partner staff within IPs and participants have a limited understanding of GA. Instances have been reported of stakeholders being confused and, mid-project implementation, inquiring about what the project was trying to achieve. When translated into other languages, the word “Graduation” can lose its meaning - people assume it means graduating from university.
- Communication around sensitive issues has been a challenge. For instance, the ending of consumption support is perhaps the most sensitive topic to bring up. In Zimbabwe, where the WFP is responsible for consumption support and has no clear strategy to cut support, the team has had to withhold information related to consumption support winding down for GA participants while other PoCs continue to receive it.
- In Mozambique, the program experienced significant difficulties targeting potential refugee participants due to severe intimidation and threats by the refugee committee and other camp members. These threats were due to the (false) understanding that any refugee participants would be indefinitely removed from any future aid or resettlement lists, which was reinforced through written (albeit inaccurate) communication on UNHCR letterhead.

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Based on experiences and learnings related to communication strategies, the following key lessons were identified:

Lessons Learned	Recommendations
<p>Transparent and frequent communication with all relevant stakeholders, including graduation participants (both refugee and host), non-participants from the local community, and other local stakeholders (partners, government, etc.) is essential to establish and maintain trust and can be critical to securing broader buy-in for the project. Failure to communicate clearly and openly can lead to misunderstandings and opposition to the project.</p>	<p>Design accurate and effective communication to bring about community mindset change/buy-in based off a map of all key stakeholders within the organization and externally, utilizing appropriate messaging for each.</p> <p>Develop and implement a clear, consistent communication strategy around specific sensitive issues/topics such as targeting, consumption support, asset transfer, etc. and the GA more generally. Ideally, this should be before implementation and should anticipate the management of expectations, such as participants’ expectations about the size and speed of change.</p> <p>Communicate clearly and honestly around the targeting/selection process, the rationale of the GA, the distribution and intended purpose of consumption support, realistic expectations around livelihood activities, etc. to all stakeholders.</p> <p>If any unanticipated challenges require a change in programming, ensure changes are explained and shared with participants and other relevant stakeholders as soon as possible to decrease the risk of broken trust.</p>

<p>Feedback mechanisms are very helpful in managing expectations, improving decision making, and building trust.</p>	<p>Embed appropriate feedback mechanisms into all Graduation programs.</p>
<p>Support of senior management staff across departments in terms of monitoring, acceptance of program, and advocacy is essential for the success of the GA.</p>	<p>GA focal point staff should maintain regular communication with senior management staff across departments to ensure a clear understanding of the purpose and logic of the GA, as well as the specific support requirement from senior management.</p> <p>Communicate realistic expectations, outcomes, and timeframes about the GA with management.</p> <p>Continue to “sell” the program to management to ensure buy-in and minimize attempts to reduce funding or other resources.</p>

### 3. Coaching Supervision

A number of issues characterized the Coaching Supervision of the GA in UNHCR refugee context.

- Unlike coaches, who come from same communities as those they coach, and usually understand participants’ situations, **the profiles of the coach supervisors in UNHCR operations are very varied.** In Mozambique, the coach supervisor is a non-technical Mozambican staff who oversees both host and refugee coaches. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, coaches are refugees themselves and report to IP technical staff. Meanwhile in Malawi, there are two full-time, non-technical coach supervisors, one from the host and refugee communities each, with the refugee supervisor responsible for refugee coaches only and host supervisor responsible for host coaches only.
- Across all operations, **most supervisors have not been using specific processes or tools for their supervision but have established more informal plans and techniques to ensure capacity building of coaches.** For instance, in the newly starting Caritas Czech-led GA program in Zambia, coaches meet with their supervisors to share their experiences – based on what they have encountered in the week prior - discuss complicated cases, highlight opportunities for improvement and strategize on best follow-up strategies. Prior to meetings, coaches submit the previous week’s update to their supervisor via an excel spreadsheet. In Mozambique, the supervisor debriefs each coach at the end of the day, shadows select coaching visits to see if coaches are using their guide/tools, accompanies coaches on household visits when they are experiencing challenges, and reviews coaches’ reports. Supervisors also organize and coordinate weekly meetings with coaches to discuss challenges and successes. Additionally, coaches occasionally attend household coaching sessions in pairs to provide each other with peer support.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Based on experiences and learnings related to Coaching Supervision, the following key lessons were identified:

Lessons Learned	Recommendations
<p>Tracking and documenting the performance of coaching/coaches is both helpful and important to program quality.</p>	<p>A system for coaching supervision and assessment, which includes regular meetings between coaches and supervisors, should be put in place at project set-up to understand what’s happening on the ground. This will allow program management to identify and address strengths and weakness, thematic areas in which coaches need to build capacity, and how to assign particular duties to specific coaches based on their strengths.</p> <p>Shadowing or monitoring of coaches and coaching can also help flag and manage unrealistic expectations (from coaches, participants and/or other key stakeholders) in a timely fashion and provide vital information, through the coaches, to participants and others.</p>
<p>Coach Supervision requires a variety of activities and approaches to effectively build and maintain the capacity of the coaches.</p>	<p>Every graduation program should have at least one full-time coach supervisor for every 10 coaches.</p> <p>Coach supervisors should be involved in planning coaching visits with coaches, periodic shadowing visits with coaches, coaching debriefs, trainings and refresher trainings of coaches, facilitation of peer-to-peer meetings, reporting, etc. These processes are vital in improving coaching performance through increased knowledge, skills, and attitudes of coaches to successfully do their jobs.</p>
<p>Coach Supervisors do not need to be technical staff with strong expertise in livelihoods or protection, but should ideally have coaching and/or case management experience.</p>	<p>As the coaching supervision role will, however, likely be fairly different from previous experiences, coach supervisors should also receive substantial training on the Graduation Approach, the role of coaches in the GA, supervision, and capacity building.</p>
<p>Coach Supervisors require support to carry out their role and ensure systematic assessment and capacity-building of coaches.</p>	<p>Supervision tools and guidance should be developed and/or adapted for each operation to provide a clearer structure for coaching supervision. Tools should be hands-on and should include a supervisor work plan, a matrix of key coaching skills/capacities, coach shadowing tools, and assessment and feedback tools.</p> <p>Operations should invest in building the capacity of the coach supervisors to understand UNHCR’s mandate, and know the focal points of different organizations (for referrals, see <a href="#">Section 7</a>) to be able to refer participants with specific protection needs to appropriate resources and services. A one-pager outlining the various organizations, services, contact person, and how to contact/access them can be extremely useful for the supervisor’s job.</p>

## 4. Monitoring and Evaluation

A number of issues characterized the Monitoring and Evaluation of the GA in UNHCR refugee context.

- A significant challenge for the SAGA pilots is the absence of dedicated UNHCR operation M&E staff to develop graduation-specific tools and M&E systems to track and analyze data, and to provide support to implementing partners. In UNHCR Mozambique, the implementing partner does not have any M&E staff.
- As a consequence to the aforementioned, there is a lack of well thought-out and streamlined monitoring tools, systems and processes for tracking household performance, livelihoods activities, household progress towards Graduation Criteria, and for monitoring coaches and the quality of their coaching. In Zambia, coaches collected weekly information that is shared with the M&E Officer, aggregated, than shared up with managers. In Malawi, the IP has different officers responsible for the collection of information related to different intervention areas, such as income generation related to livestock, crops, and business enterprises. Coaches gather information from individual households using the graduation map tool and self-assessment skills tools. In Zimbabwe – the plan is to conduct baseline, midline and endline. Coaches use a portfolio tracking tool to monitor weekly savings progress, and to collate information - total income, use of money – at the end of each month. Aside from household monitoring tools, other tools track agricultural productivity. In Mozambique, the plan is to collect baseline, midline and endline for cohort one and conduct and RCT for the second cohort, using different tools.

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Based on experiences and learnings related to monitoring and evaluation, the following key lessons were identified:

Lessons Learned	Recommendation
Using only the UNHCR standard livelihood indicators does not allow for monitoring that is adapted for Graduation; however, the implementation of completely independent monitoring systems by each operation and/or IP does not allow for cross-learning.	Country operations should adopt a select set of standardized core GA indicators that are common across all Graduation programs. This would enable analysis and comparison across different programs and context, which would enable cross-learning.  As full standardization would eliminate adaptability to local context, which is also important, additional context-specific indicators should also be included, as appropriate. The appropriate number and type of standardized core indicators, however, would still need to be determined to as to limit rigidity, but allow for comparison.
Need for appropriate M&E tools that are adapted to the Graduation Approach, context, and backgrounds of the coaches and participants, are essential for effective and reliable monitoring and adaptive management.	Operations should standardize monitoring and evaluation tools and systems by taking advantage of the tools recently developed and shared by Trickle Up, making adaptations to these or other existing tools, or developing new tools which can be used nationally/globally for consistent data collection which, in turn, supports data analysis within and across programs, enabling effective coaching and adaptive project management.

	<p>Data collection tools should be simple and clear so that coaches or other data collectors can easily implement them, reducing the room for error. When designing tools or making adaptation consideration should include the literacy level of coaches- the ability to easily comprehend and local language for effective usage.</p> <p>Streamline M&amp;E tools to focus only on relevant and appropriate data in order to increase efficiency and respect the time of participants. The number of indicators should be limited to respect the time of participants and ensure there is sufficient time to focus on the primary role of household visits – coaching. To limit the time commitment and number of indicators, select only those indicators/questions that will be most useful for informing programming and support to participants. Indicators which do not have a direct purpose for adaptive management should either not be collected or, if required, only be collected on an infrequent basis (i.e. baseline/endline).</p> <p>Use digital data collection tools such as smartphones or mobile devices to reduce time invested in collecting and analyzing data and data entry errors.</p>
<p>With proper support, coaches can be leveraged for data collection and monitoring purposes.</p>	<p>M&amp;E staff should train coaches on proper use of data collection tools and reporting. Coaches engage participants on ongoing/daily basis, it suffice that they are fully equipped to execute their roles. As such during household monitoring, coaches will clearly be able track how each household is advancing in relation to the Graduation Criteria, and thus adjust their coaching as needed by the participants. Reports will serve as a reference for the coach to review before each household visit.</p>
<p>The UNHCR global system is not yet adapted for Graduation monitoring and would require buy-in at the UNHCR global/HQ level.</p>	<p>While ideally, GA monitoring should be integrated within broader institutional M&amp;E systems so as to avoid duplicity, for the time-being, additional M&amp;E systems must be used to supplement UNHCR systems to ensure appropriate monitoring is being conducted.</p>
<p>M&amp;E is often deprioritized in Graduation projects given the limited human and financial resources and the time constraints. This greatly affects the ability to learn from the pilots and ensure positive results.</p>	<p>Invest properly in M&amp;E, allocate at least 10-15% of the total budget towards such purposes and ensuring the presence of a dedicated M&amp;E-specialized staff to focus on the Graduation program. This will help address the need for more intensive and adapted monitoring. To support buy-in for this, it is essential to communication the importance of M&amp;E to senior management and other staff (GA and non-GA).</p>

## 5. Sustainable Program Management

A number of issues characterized sustainable program management of the GA in UNHCR refugee context.

- Graduation implementation across operations faced multiple and competing organizational priorities. In countries like Zimbabwe, the implementing partner struggled between managing Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and conventional livelihoods activities being implemented simultaneously with the GA program, and the recent humanitarian crisis (cyclone Idai).
- Another hurdle was insufficient livelihoods funding that impedes implementation. This insufficient funding, in the case of Zambia was a result of the operation's competing priorities. The emergency situation leading to relocation of refugees to the Mantapala Refugee Settlement forced the operation to reprioritize funding from graduation livelihoods in Meheba and Mayukwayukwa. A direct consequence was that graduation was funded for 6 months through UNHCR support – resulting in a compromise to continuity and quality. Also related is UNHCR's budget cycle – specifically, the lack of alignment of funding cycles *between* UNHCR, external donors, and the local context (taking into consideration, for example, seasonality for agricultural related livelihoods, humanitarian needs), which often put pressure on programming to deprioritize ideal timing and sequencing in favor of responding to budget availability.
- Another challenge was inadequate staffing, including high turnover and limited pre-existing technical capacity on livelihoods and Graduation, both within UNHCR and implementing partners' organizations. Some operations have limited livelihoods and/or M&E staff to designate dedicated staff to manage the implementation of the GA. Other operations have experienced a reduction in the number of livelihoods officers, including down to zero, due to funding gaps (as it is the case in Zambia). In Zambia, the new IP staff (Caritas Czech) have not received any proper training on the GA as they have just begun to work with UNHCR on Graduation (after former IP SHA had received significant training and capacity-building). In Mozambique, repeated staff turnover has caused TU to work with 4 different livelihoods officers, none of whom remain. GOAL Zimbabwe had limited field staff to support GA implementation in Tongogara. These staffing problems have had an immediate negative impact on GA programming in terms of staff capacity and morale, and will continue to affect the pilots post-August, when TU's support under the BPRM grant comes to a close.
- The lack of a strong and effective private sector mobilization to tap into companies' expertise, incentive and capacity to link refugees with the market, to formal financial services, and potentially to large plots for agricultural production, etc. remains a challenge to address. The Malawian operation has so far pursued a process of linking GA participants engaged in soya beans production with Soyola company- and a formal memorandum of understanding to guarantee equitable business practices.
- Participants' lack of a solid understanding of the GA led to lack of interest in participation, unrealistic expectations, dropouts and disappointment. Staff and coaches' insufficient understanding also undermined program's ability to effectively communicate about GA to stakeholders including coordination with other UNHCR units to/and reach expected outcomes.
- Not enough emphasis or effort was placed on regular, quality monitoring with implications for data quality and thus adaptive management.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Based on experiences and learnings related to sustainable program management, the following key lessons were identified:

Lessons Learned	Recommendations
Engaging strategic stakeholders from the beginning in program planning, design and implementation, can have resounding impact.	Carry out a thorough stakeholder mapping of potential partners and other service providers including resource mapping are important to fill potential programming gaps.
Annual budget cycles are not well aligned with Graduation programming and can often lead to program gaps and delays.	<p>Heavily consider the risks of proceeding with implementation without having funding secured for implementation of the full program, including sufficient time for planning. Dedicate multi-year funding or actively pursue multi-year and multi-source funding for both humanitarian and development programs, other than just emergency funding.</p> <p>Consider working with the newly formed, UNHCR-convened Coalition to Alleviate Poverty for resource mobilization.</p>
It is essential to help the donor to understand the unique challenges of the Graduation Approach and any reasons for changes or delays.	a. IP should dedicate a field based-graduation focal point for improved rapport with donor(s). Constant, clear and effective written and in-person with donor(s) like UNHCR, not just with those involved in GA implementation, but across all programs, across all stakeholders, can increase understanding around the investment and priorities to pursue through 18 months minimum without de-prioritizing midway (see <a href="#">Section 2</a> ).
High staff turnover often leads to loss of program knowledge and Graduation expertise, limited continuity of programming, and gaps.	<p>Build and implement knowledge management systems from the beginning. Clearly outline the strategy and process of collecting, analyzing, managing, and sharing relevant graduation information throughout implementation. Project timeline and staff's role(s) within the process should also be clarified/explained ahead of implementation - to be able to address bottlenecks that would affect program management and implementation.</p> <p>Broadly build the capacities and knowledge of all staff to counteract insufficient understanding of GA by participants, staff and/or coaches to ensure buy-in and support.</p> <p>Organize training(s) on the GA, and key messaging as well as periodic reinforcement through participation in bi-weekly meetings or quarterly meetings, sharing of GA related reports etc.</p>
The Graduation Approach is a complex project which requires sufficient and dedicated staff. A small 1-2 person team is unlikely to have the bandwidth to implement a GA pilot without substantial support.	Ensure at least one dedicated full-time GA focal point as well as support staff, including logistics, HR, programs, finance, and M&E staff, who will dedicate time to the GA from the beginning. Ideally these staff members would have long-term contracts to reduce turnover.

## 6. Network Engagement

A number of issues characterized network engagement of the GA in UNHCR refugee context:

- The UNHCR operations implementing the GA in Southern African region have all established opportunities for network engagement among Graduation participants. However, this engagement is often not intentionally promoted.
- Most commonly, these operations establish network engagement opportunities through the savings component. By establishing savings groups, they are creating opportunities for participants to regularly meet with and get to know other members. The social fund typically included provides another mechanism for increasing the sense of solidarity and social capital.
- Some operations have also included additional network opportunities such as farmers associations, commodity producer groups, or cooperatives. These groups typically serve a dual purpose of developing networks and meeting other objectives, often related to livelihoods.

### Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Based on experiences and learnings related to network engagement, the following key lessons were identified and recommendation provided:

Lessons Learned	Recommendation
<p>Participants are typically placed in various groups through the GA; however, group membership alone does not ensure strong network engagement. Network opportunities need to be more intentionally designed to ensure solidarity and trust is able to form. Opportunities related to livelihoods and savings have been particularly beneficial for participants as they can support each other in a variety of manners.</p>	<p>Add network-promoting activities to these group structures to promote increased solidarity, such as leadership-building activities and relationship or conflict management trainings.</p>
	<p>a.Groups for network engagement should be formed based on common purpose, such as similar livelihoods activities or savings goals. While the ideal composition of the group may be context-dependent, it is often preferable to establish relatively homogenous groups where participants are of a similar age, gender, and language to promote comfort and trust between participants. Groups should also be established based on ease of accessibility. Ideally, groups should integrate host and refugee participants to promote integration. However, this may not be possible in areas with particularly high tensions, physical segregation or where there is no shared language.</p>
	<p>Core groups for the network engagement component should remain relatively small (15-20 participants) to encourage the development of stronger connections between members. It can, however, be beneficial to connect these small core groups to broader networks to allow not only depth of connection, but also breadth.</p>
	<p>Core groups that are the basis for network engagement should meet regularly, ideally at least once a week, particularly during the initial stages, to establish strong bonds. Once strong engagement has been established, the frequency of group meetings can be reduced, as appropriate, without affecting the network engagement component. Broader networks that supplement the core groups can meet on a less frequent basis.</p>



<p>Providing for network engagement solely through savings groups may limit the sustainability of ongoing network engagement beyond the end of the program in cases where the savings groups are largely dependent on external/IP staff.</p>	<p>Core groups that are the basis for network engagement should be led by participants themselves, at least after initial establishment and training, to promote post-intervention network sustainability. Too intensive support of the groups by GA staff may negatively affect the ability of the group to carry on after the end of the intervention.</p>
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## 7. Referrals and Linkages

A number of issues were discussed about GA referrals and linkages in the UNHCR refugee context:

- Participants discussed what is meant by the term “Referrals and Linkages” to strengthen their understanding of the component. This component is meant to link participants to available and appropriate support services to help address protection and/or market needs and concerns, such as legal documentation, business licenses, health clinics, services that address specific needs related to disabilities, SGBV, and psychosocial support.
- UNHCR operations acknowledged the existence of basic services, and accessible to all persons of concern including refugees and host communities, as applicable.
- Coaches in Malawi received an orientation in referral systems, are in possession of a list of focal points/organizations responsible for addressing protection issues, and are have been proactively providing basic referrals related to health services, as needed.
- In Zambia, linkages connected participants to markets through the commodity producer groups for sales of produce and buying of inputs, and to savings through Natsave, a local microfinance institution. As such, participants have gained access to customized savings products and market actors.
- In Malawi, UNHCR advocated for refugees to be able to join banking services by developing an excellent relationship with the Government of Malawi and the Central Bank, resulting in the opening of the New Finance Bank in Dzaleka camp.

### Lessons Learned/Recommendations

Discussions related to referrals and linkages surfaced the following recommendations:

Lesson Learned	Recommendations
<p>Referrals and linkages may often be left out of Graduation programming if there is no standardized approach to determining the relevant services that are available and facilitating the connection.</p>	<p>Conduct a need assessment to determine which services Graduation participants struggle to access and that are not provided directly through the Graduation project.</p>
	<p>Based on this assessment, identify useful referrals or linkages for participants and their service providers.</p>
	<p>a. Equip coaches with relevant information regarding all referral and or linkages services available to participants. Checklists are invaluable to enable coaches to understand the minimum criteria for referral to a service and the referral process, and to have the appropriate information on hand to share with participants. Careful tracking and follow-up on referrals is important.</p>
	<p>Activate continuous advocacy/communication with relevant referral partners (even where there is an existing Memorandum of Understanding) for relationship maintenance to ensure progress continues.</p>

## 8. Core Capacity Building

A number of issues characterized Core Capacity Building of the GA in UNHCR refugee context:

- Core trainings, which are required of all Graduation participants irrespective of their selected income generating activities, are successfully being provided by UNHCR’s IPs in all concerned operations.
- Most commonly, these operations provided a variety of core training topics on savings training, financial literacy, gender, nutrition, behavior change and language to equip participants with the basic skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to build and strengthen resilience.
- With the exception of Mozambique, the language of training instruction has been English or Swahili with any needed translation support performed by refugees.
- Core trainings have been delivered by a combination of service providers from government line ministries, private sector service providers such as microfinance institutions, and NGO support partners. However, in some operations, some topics are shared among more than one partner.

### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Based on the discussions related to Core Capacity Building, the following recommendations were provided:

Lessons Learned	Recommendations
Core Capacity Building is more effective when it is needs-based and adapted to the backgrounds of participants.	It is essential to complete a needs assessment to determine the appropriate topics for core capacity trainings. The socioeconomic assessment (SEA) can incorporate questions around core capacity needs and be used to inform programming.  Tailor training curricula and materials to need the needs of the target population. While a variety of training materials may exist for a given training topic, they are often designed for different audiences and may not be well suited to best suit the learning needs of GA participants. Reviewing and adapting the materials to fit the backgrounds of participants can increase participants’ learning potential.
Leveraging existing resources can reduce duplication of efforts.	Operations should work with and coordinate relevant stakeholders both in the determination of training topics and partners as well as the development of training curricula and materials. Operations, however, should be sure to ensure proper coordination between stakeholders to ensure that training topics and methodologies align one with another.
Participants are more likely to fully engage and appreciate the trainings when they have a clear understanding of the rationale and goals behind them.	Operations should more actively sensitize participants as to the rationale of the core capacity trainings.  Coaches should be trained on how to communicate the topics and rationale to participants.

	Once the final list of core capacity trainings has been developed, Trickle Up recommends mapping out the timeline for these trainings within the broader Graduation timeline to ensure proper sequencing.
Learning requires repetition and practice to master new skills.	UNHCR and partners should ensure sufficient time and budget that allow for refresher trainings on the key topics identified for core trainings.

## 9. Scaling GA into Government Programs

To increase participants’ understanding of what we mean by “scaling up” through government programs in the UNHCR refugee context and its key considerations:

- SAGA workshop participants discussed “scaling up” generally. Some had thought that scale up was synonymous with simply expanding the project through implementing with additional cohorts, reaching a few hundred more participants rather than the thousands, or tens of thousands that can be reached through integration with government programs. Participants then discussed why, in the right circumstances, it can be an important goal despite the complexity of working with governments. There are some governments that are doing GA, but not with refugees, as part of their social safety nets. Ecuador is an example of a government scaling up GA and including refugees, probably in large part due to the Ecuador’s enabling environment – refugees in Ecuador have freedom of movement and the right to work as well as a strong commitment by UNHCR and IP HIAS to work closely with the government in this process. Most refugees also share a common language with their host communities.
- *As none of the workshop participants’ programs are scaling up, the discussion focused on considerations rather than lessons learned or a recommended scale up strategy.* Considerations included inclusion of host communities, whether there is access to land, ensuring that learnings are clearly documented and using those learnings when planning scale-up, choosing a location for scale-up (high density of stable, low mobility target group), finding the most appropriate partners for scaling and utilizing existing market opportunities. One major challenge mentioned by several participants were the massive differences between i.e. consumption support and asset transfers provided by UNHCR and those provided by Government or similar national institutions.

# Conclusion

As mentioned above, there were a number of challenges that are quite specific to UNHCR's systems in respect to implementing GA with refugees. Trickle Up would like to emphasize that unless or until UNHCR is able to resolve these challenges— particularly around staffing and budget cycles - operations will continue to struggle against the same recurring challenges. It is essential to ensure mistakes do not repeat themselves, which requires that operations do not continue to start from scratch with new staff or have to put the program on hold until further funding is made available.

As the BPRM grant that provided for technical assistance from Trickle Up comes to an end on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2019, the SAGA workshop provided an opportunity to ensure UNHCR operations are as well set up as possible to successfully complete their GA pilots. Looking forward, beyond the grant that has provided for Trickle Up's technical assistance and support of the UNHCR GA pilot operations, the following key decisions were agreed by UNHCR operations for ongoing support in the SAGA CoP:

Activity	Lead	Date
1. Review of M&E tools and systems to capitalize on efforts already achieved in the Graduation pilot.	Justice Machingura, GOAL Zimbabwe	July 2019
2. Create WhatsApp group chat for UNHCR and IP GA focal points	Richmond Msowoya, UNHCR Malawi	July 2019
3. Lead on quarterly webinar call	George Oduor, UNHCR Zambia	September 2019
4. Create SAGA CoP emailing for resource exchange etc.	Richmond Msowoya, UNHCR Malawi	June-July 2019
5. Share learning with other operations planning to initiate GA in the future, to prevent them from making the same "mistakes" or experiencing all the same challenges.	Line Pedersen, UNHCR HQ	August 2019

Trickle Up encourages close collaboration between operations going forward as they finalize pilot activities, take stock of the progress achieved in the GA pilots to plan for additional cohorts.

Recommended external communities of practice that focus on livelihoods and self-reliance of people living in extreme poverty, including refugees are:

1. **Partnership for Economic Inclusion**<sup>5</sup> (PEI), a World Bank-hosted global partnership supporting the adoption of economic inclusion programs, including GA, at scale and creating a platform for learning and knowledge.
2. **Refugee Self Reliance Initiative**<sup>6</sup> (RSRI), a coalition of NGOs, government agencies, funders and others partners led by Women's Refugee Commission and RefugePoint which promotes opportunities for refugees to become self-reliant. The RSRI has developed and is testing a tool, the Self-Reliance Index, to track household progress towards self-reliance with a set of indicators that closely align to typical Graduation Criteria.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jobsanddevelopment.org/pei/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/>

During the workshop, *Trickle Up* also shared a set of useful resources to help operations improve on knowledge management and program quality. These current tools and resources developed include:

- Background information and TU publications on the GA
- GA Standards
- Graduation design resources
- M&E Resources
- Onboarding/training tools (including access to an online course on LINGOs)

ROSA and Trickle Up would like to congratulate UNHCR operations for the successful learning and implementation of the graduation approach in refugee settings. It has been no easy feat. There have been countless challenges arising from the implementation of the GA in the Southern Africa region, such as delays, staff turnover and funding constraints, which added to the already-significant complexity in program management.

We also appreciate UNHCR GA focal point staff and IP partners for their engagement, openness and active participation in the workshop's exchanges and hope that they will put into practice all that has been learned during the workshop and which applies to their respective programs.