

Graduation and Food Security

Around the world, [over 900 million people](#) face severe food insecurity. Despite commitments made in response to the Sustainable Development Goals, the world has not been making significant progress toward the [eradication of food insecurity and malnutrition](#) over the last six years. Food security and other issues it is inextricably linked to like climate change, poverty, and gender inequality have all been [exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19](#) and threaten millions worldwide with famine.

Food Security and Extreme Poverty

Food insecurity is [deeply tied to conditions of extreme poverty](#) due both to rising costs of food and to a lack of access to healthy, nutritious foods. Worsening economic, climatic, and agricultural shocks such as drought and floods stemming from less predictable rainy seasons disproportionately impact people living in extreme poverty, making it harder to consistently feed families as well as any livestock assets. Smallholder farmers are at twin risks of losing their livelihoods through crop failures from these shocks as well as facing reduced ability to access or pay for food due to a loss of income.

Achieving zero hunger requires holistic approaches that recognize and address the deeply intertwined realities of food insecurity and extreme poverty. To reach both the goal of zero hunger and the eradication of extreme poverty by 2030, the international community must back evidence-based programs which enable households to build resilient livelihoods so that they can access and afford nutritious food now and in the long term.

Food Security and Graduation

Graduation promotes food security holistically so that participating households can experience long-term improvements in their household nutritional status. From the start of the program, BRAC often considers chronic food insecurity in its multidimensional evaluation of and targeting of participant households. By supporting participants to develop diversified income-generating activities both on- and off-farm, BRAC enables them to meet their basic needs while improving their resilience to climate and market stressors. Training on managing livelihoods, health and hygiene practices, and nutrition education help to ensure that participants have the tools they need to maximize their food security status and maintain resilience to shocks.



Lois, a participant involved in the Programme for Rural Outreach of Financial Innovations and Technologies (PROFIT) showcases her produce and crops in Kitui, Kenya

Because of this multidimensional approach, policies and programs based on Graduation have been proven to provide a safety net for participants and their families, empowering them to improve their food security and economic prospects.

Driving Down Malnutrition

A Fonkoze-BRAC Graduation pilot in Haiti found that the program decreased the rate of severe child undernutrition from [13 percent to 4 percent at the end of the program](#). Additionally, the percentage of food insecure households declined by over 50 percent by the end of the program, despite consumption support having ended months prior.

Meanwhile, [World Bank research](#) on BRAC's

flagship Graduation program in [Bangladesh](#) found improvements in both food security and dietary diversification that extended well beyond the close of the program. Participants' children under five years of age were 30 percent less likely to be underweight and 11 percent less likely to have low weight-for-height. This study also found that Graduation programs benefit children under five from non-participating households in the community, possibly due to participants passing lessons learned from the program on to others in their communities. [Adult members](#) of participating households were also found to be 11 percent less likely to be moderately thin and 8 percent less likely to be severely thin.

Adapting Graduation

BRAC's Graduation approach has been adapted to meet the needs of many complex contexts facing extreme poverty and food insecurity. From our start in Bangladesh, BRAC has provided technical assistance and implementation of the Graduation approach in 18 countries over the last 19 years. Working with local governments and communities, BRAC helps integrate Graduation into existing social protection systems to meet the unique needs and factors of specific regions.

The Need for Action

As COVID-19 threatens to [double the number of people](#) experiencing acute hunger and famines are affecting millions of lives in Yemen, South Sudan, northeast Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is more urgent than ever to strengthen multidimensional approaches to combat food insecurity. Global investments in [social protection policies](#) based on evidence-based approaches like Graduation are critical not only for responding to the immediate crisis caused by the pandemic but also for ensuring the long-term eradication of hunger and poverty around the world.

From top: A participant in Ultra-Poor Graduation program in Bangladesh waters her garden; A participant in the Samburu region of Kenya sells produce at a local market as part of her livelihoods developed through the PROFIT Graduation pilot; and a BRAC UPGI coach instructs participants on nutrition in the Philippines.

