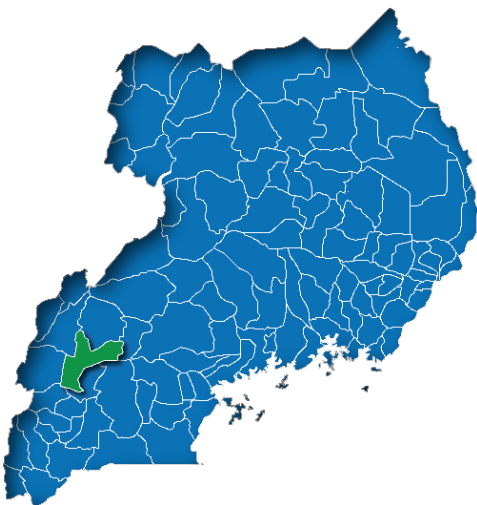


Digital Adaptations & Participant Results

Graduating to Resilience is a 7-year USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) funded Activity implemented by AVSI Foundation, in partnership with Trickle Up and the American Institutes for Research (AIR). The Activity seeks to test the Graduation Approach's ability to graduate 13,200 economically active, but ultra-poor refugee and host community households in Kamwenge District, Uganda from food insecurity and fragile livelihoods to self-reliance and resilience.

These briefs share learning and insight gathered through after-action reviews after the first year of implementation of cohort 2 (Cohort 1 was conducted over 30 months, ending in June 2021, and followed by a 6-month refinement period prior to the start of cohort 2) which began in February 2022 and will run for 24 months. Findings will inform refinements and adaptations needed for the remaining year of programming as well as contributing to the evidence base around the model and promote the most effective and efficient approach to supporting extremely poor households to become more self-reliant and resilient.



BACKGROUND

Graduating to Resilience (the Activity) aims to equip participants with the knowledge and skills required to engage in markets, grow their household savings, and build sustainable livelihoods, and as such, the promotion of digital literacy and technology has proven to be key to the achievement of these objectives. By providing participants with mobile phones alongside digital literacy training, the Activity is integrating the use of digital technology and products to strengthen household resilience.

At the end of cohort 1, the Activity piloted a [Digital Skills Training Program](#) with the support of the Digital Development Partnership, administered by the World Bank, and the EQUALS Global Partnership Access Coalition. This project tested two approaches to improve women's digital literacy and inclusion. Developed by Trickle Up and AVSI, the curriculum cover the basics of using a smartphone, benefits and risks of having a smartphone, introduction to mobile money, and an introduction to the MobiPay application (which is used to purchase agro-inputs). The curriculum was then developed into 15 animated videos. The curriculum was delivered to 208 participants from cohort 1, all women from 12 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) who had completed cohort 1.

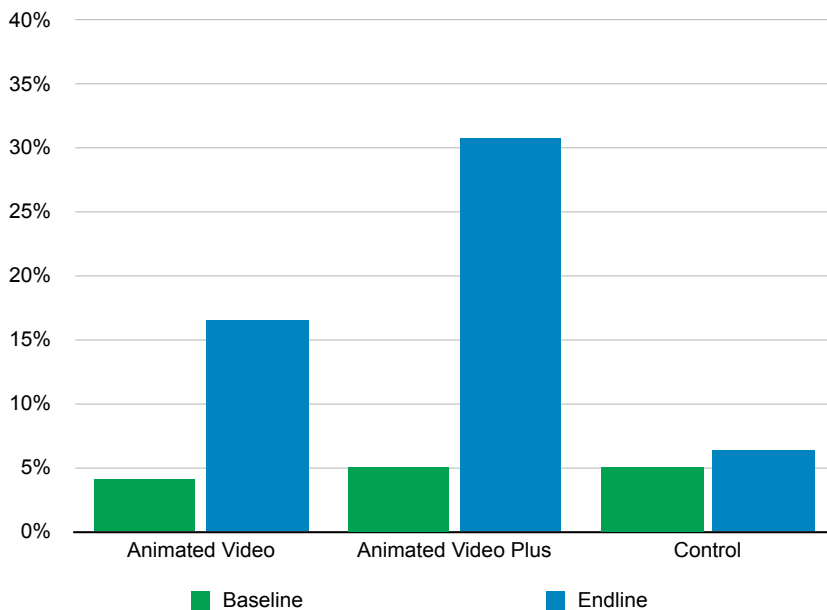


Photo: AVSI Foundation

The EQUALS pilot tested two modes of curriculum delivery, including 1) delivery of only video modules (animation) over two weeks, and 2) delivery of video modules along with in-person support from a trained facilitator (animation plus) over six weeks, with half of the participants in each group. Results were also compared against a control group of women from 6 VSLAs. The EQUALS pilot was launched in October 2021, commencing with sensitization of households, followed by the distribution of smartphones, and digital literacy training.

Quantitative data was collected from all participants at both baseline and endline. As seen in the graph below, both groups of EQUALS participants significantly increased digital literacy compared to baseline (from 4% to 16.5% for animation and from 5% to 30.8% for animation plus), while there was no significant change for the control group (from 5% to 6.3%). Results were strongest for the animation plus group, which demonstrated the effectiveness of pairing video with in-person instruction.

Digital Literacy Skills



	Baseline	Endline
Animated Video	4%	16.5%
Animated Video Plus	5%	30.8%
Control	5%	6.3%



How we ADAPTED

Following the completion of cohort 1, the Activity conducted a design refinement process to incorporate lessons learned on how to most effectively promote digital literacy for participants. The following adaptations were made for cohort 2.

- **All participants received cell phones from the Activity.** Most participants, particularly women, did not have access to a phone, so inclusion of phones was necessary to promote access to digital tools. Given budgetary constraints, the phones distributed to cohort 2 participants were a less expensive feature phone rather than a smartphone used in the EQUALS pilot.

- **The EQUALS digital literacy curriculum was adapted and scaled to all participants.** The curriculum was reviewed and adapted for the basic feature phone model used in cohort 2.
- **Coaches and Community Based Trainers (CBTs) received training to help participants develop digital skills.** Following the model of the video plus group in the EQUALS pilot, Program Officers trained all CBTs, to deliver the curriculum to all cohort 2 participants and helped them navigate issues they encounter.

WHAT WE LEARNED

In February 2023, at the end of the first year of cohort 2, the Activity conducted series of after-action reviews (AARs) with 118 individuals to better understand the impact of digital adaptations on participants. Four focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with a total of 54 participants from the EQUALS pilot and four FGDs were conducted with 54 current participants from cohort 2, including female primary participants and male/youth participants (some of whom were primary participants and some of whom were household members) within both refugee and host communities. An additional FGD was conducted with 5 coaches and 5 CBTs with experience in both the pilot and adaptation to cohort 2.



Photo: AVSI Foundation

- **EQUALS participants continue to use their smartphones a year and a half after the end of the project.** Approximately two thirds of the EQUALS participants who participated in the FGDs reported they are still in possession of the smartphone they received. They use the device to make calls and send messages, record and watch videos, and use mobile money for both saving money and sending/receiving payments. The most common reasons from participants who no longer had their smartphone was theft, damage, or giving the device to a family member.
- **Cohort 2 participants reported that female primary participants have access to and use their phone, but their (male) spouse are often the primary user of the phone.** Within the female refugee group, quite a few participants shared that their husbands were the main users of the phone, noting the following reasons: they were illiterate, they found it difficult to use, they felt their spouse (man) needed it more for contacts and seeking employment opportunities, or because they did not want to create issues of mistrust or conflict between themselves and their husband. Both groups of male/youth indicated men use the phone more because they are more literate and *“men have more contacts and roles that require communicating with external people, unlike women whose work is mostly done from home.”* Interestingly, the **female host community group indicated that women were the main users of the phone** although it was used jointly by other household members.

- **In contrast, EQUALS participants overwhelmingly reported they are the primary users of their phone and roughly 70% of participants still had their phones.** This is likely the result of the intentional sensitization period during the EQUALS pilot that emphasized the goal of improving women’s digital literacy through ownership and use of smartphones prior to disbursing the phones.
- **Equipping participants with digital tools and skills leads to strong outcomes for building resilience.** As participants, coaches, and CBTs explained, digital tools equip participants for success in a variety of ways, enabling them to better manage their livelihood and savings as well as strengthen relationships with neighbors and coaches. The impact on participants’ overall resilience was evident based on internal Activity data collection measuring the resilience of cohort 1 participants (18 months following completion of the initial intervention), which showed that EQUALS participants were more likely to meet resilience-related criteria compared to other cohort 1 participants. 66% of EQUALS participants met resilience criteria compared to 61% of all cohort 1 participants, which is statistically significant ($p=0.000$). This includes 82% of EQUALS participants versus 72% of cohort 1 for host communities and 52% of EQUALS participants versus 50% of cohort 1. Also statistically significant, 75% of EQUALS animation plus participants met resilience criteria, while only 59% of animation participants did.
- **Female participants in cohort 2 expressed that they developed digital skills and increased their comfort and confidence in using their phones.** Many female participants did not know how to use a phone prior to their participation in the Activity, but reported that they now feel comfortable and confident using their phones after digital literacy training. They use their phones to make calls, receive mobile money (for consumption support), use tools such as the calculator and calendar, play music and videos, and access local and international news.



- **Access to digital technology and information has improved participant businesses and livelihoods.** Phones allow cohort 2 participants to communicate directly with buyers and sellers, allowing them to save time, reduce transportation costs, and gather more accurate market information. Participants indicate that they use their phones to share photos of their products with buyers and agree on prices ahead of time, use the calculator to verify the total price of goods, communicate directly with transporters of wholesale goods, and learn about market prices through the radio or calling/messaging others in the market. One female refugee participant used the phone to record key livelihood-related messages

Photo: AVSI Foundation

from trainings and events organized by the Activity. EQUALS participants also reported that they used their phones to improve their livelihoods, including some who had recently used the AgroBase market information system mobile application to buy fertilizer and pesticides when these inputs were out of stock in the nearest market.

“When we went for the market event [organized as part of the Activity], we learned many things like how to dig and plant crops. I also used my phone to record some videos and take pictures of things at the market event so I can remind myself.”

- Female refugee participant

- **Both cohort 2 and EQUALS participants indicated the phone has supported their household to save through mobile money.** Their phones also enable them to withdraw money as needed, which is particularly helpful when households need to pay school fees. One participant from the EQUALS group shared that she regularly deposits her daily income on mobile money, keeping it safe until the day she goes shopping. This allows her to avoid the risk of carrying a large amount of cash.
- **Participants described positive impacts on their self-confidence, social capital, and household dynamics as a result of access to phones and gaining digital skills.** Many participants expressed that they are proud of their phones and the different functions they have learned how to perform. They also appreciate that the phones gave them a means to help their neighbors when they need to borrow a phone, enabling them to strengthen social ties in their community. In addition, the phones brought household members together to watch videos or listen to music and allowed them to keep in touch with family members who live in other countries.
- **Coaches and CBTs expressed that digitization efforts supported participant understanding and learning.** When participants have access to cell phones, coaches are able to share updates related to the Activity in real time, increasing transparency and trust by participants. The use of targeted spot messages in local languages (via Telerevit) and animated videos to reinforce coaching messages improves participants' understanding. EQUALS participants highlighted their satisfaction with the videos, and some stated they continue to use the videos to refresh the knowledge on livelihood and savings management that they gained through the Activity.

“There is a video which was shared by the coach, the video contained a woman who was buying and selling chicken, she acquired eggs which she sold and got profits and sent to the VSLA to save. From this video I learned that I can save and do something to develop my future.”

- Female refugee participant

- **Digital adaptations facilitate the coaching relationship and cohesion among coaching group members.** Participants can more easily contact their coach using their phone when a need arises. One female refugee participant from cohort 2 explained, *“In situations where we are in group sessions and there happens to be a challenge, I can easily call my coach and inform him of the problems we are having so that he comes and assists the group.”* Other participants indicated the phones made it easier to reach out to other group members to seek support or advice. It was also easier to mobilize group members because they can call or message the group instead of going to their homes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Activities promoting resilience and improved livelihoods should provide access to digital devices and build participants’ digital skills. Digital tools are useful for participants to receive and review key messages, access resources to strengthen their livelihoods, manage their finances, and connect with their communities. While costs associated with providing mobile phones can be seen as expensive, when paired with a structured digital literacy curriculum they provide participants with the skills to access information and improve their self-reliance.



Photo: AVSI Foundation

A mix of training techniques (video modules paired with in-person training) should be used to enable greater understanding, uptake, and use of digital tools. Engaging animated videos that are adapted to the local context and available in local languages effectively deliver key messages and provide a lasting resource, while in-person support is critical to increase participants’ confidence in using their devices.

Digital literacy and skills training should be integrated into the coaching curriculum. Coaching sessions are an opportunity to provide continuous practice, apply new skills, and incorporate the use of digital tools to strengthen household resilience.

Sensitization of household members is critical to ensure female participants have ownership and agency over their phones. Sensitization should be conducted in advance of phone distribution so

that all household members understand the female participant should be the primary user of the phone and gain their buy-in for the goal of increasing women's digital literacy.

In low literacy contexts, basic literacy training can increase participants' confidence and use of digital tools. While the digital literacy curriculum explains how to use the phone using simplified language and illustrations, participants with low literacy levels benefit from additional basic literacy training to increase their confidence and ability to perform more complicated functions.

Direct coordination with service providers is recommended to ensure successful uptake of devices and troubleshoot issues. Coordination with mobile phone service providers is necessary to ensure spare parts and technicians are accessible within the area. This could be provided directly from the service provider or used as an opportunity to train and support participants to establish businesses to provide these services.



HOW WE WILL CONTINUE LEARNING

The Activity made progress in developing an effective digital literacy curriculum and identifying successful strategies to deliver and increase the use of digital technology. As the Activity enters its final year, it will continue to track graduation and resilience outcomes to understand if cohort 2 participants, who benefited from Activity adaptations based on learning from the EQUALS pilot, see similar positive results. The Activity will also continue to track EQUALS participants to understand if their positive outcomes are sustained over time. Learning from cohort 2 will be shared with donors, policymakers, local stakeholders, and other organizations implementing the Graduation Approach to contribute to the evidence base around the model and promote the most effective and efficient approach to supporting extremely poor households to become more self-reliant and resilient.



Photo: AVSI Foundation